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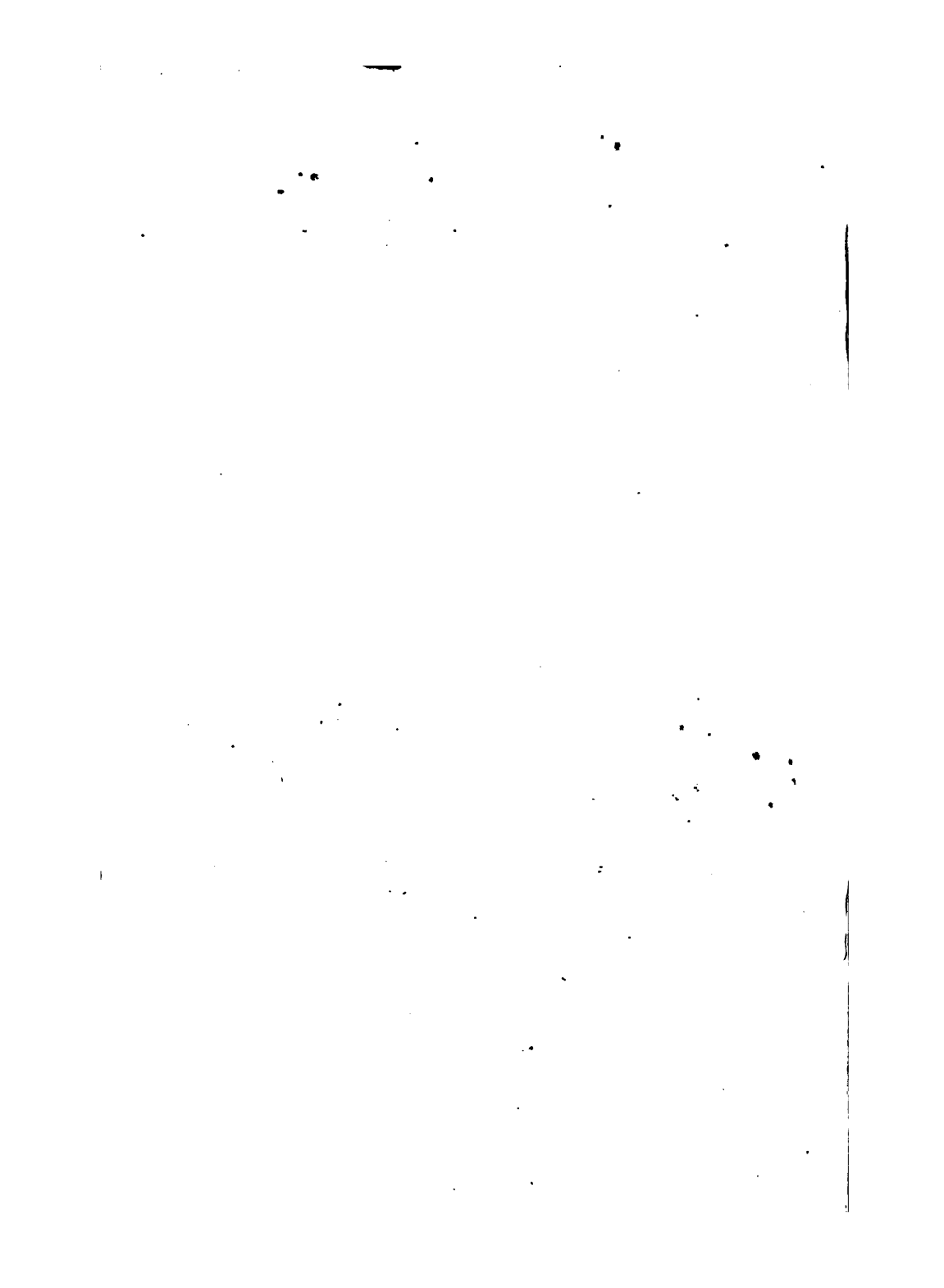
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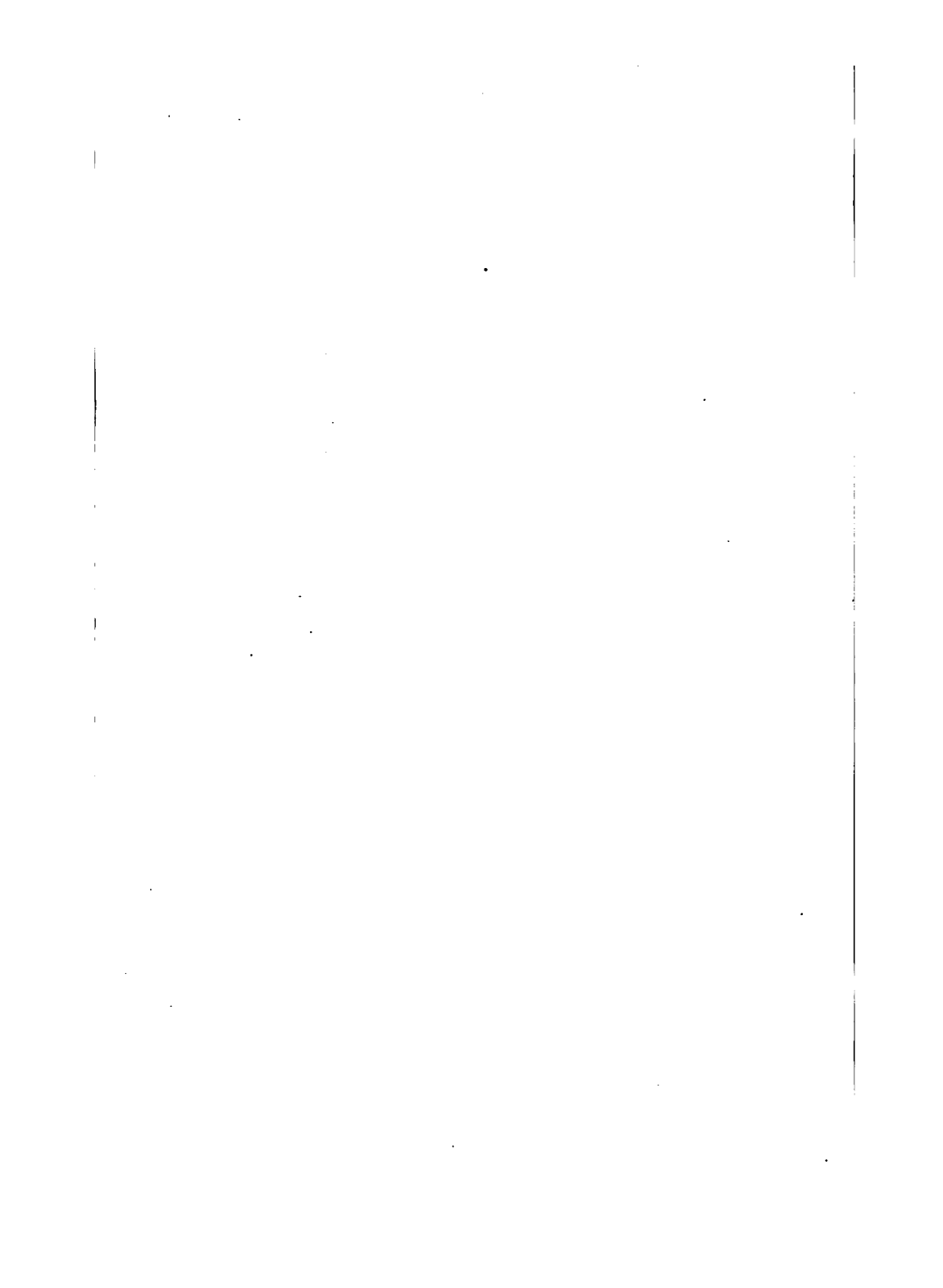






Wm H. Larkins
from his Mother
Feb 1st
1889

THREE COUNSELS
OF
THE DIVINE MASTER



THREE COUNSELS
OF
THE DIVINE MASTER

FOR THE
Conduct of the Spiritual Life

PART I.—THE COUNSEL FOR THE COMMENCEMENT

PART II.—THE COUNSEL FOR THE VIRTUES

PART III.—THE COUNSEL FOR THE CONFLICT

BY EDWARD MEYRICK GOULBURN, D.D.
DEAN OF NORWICH

"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life."
ST. JOHN vi. 68.

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CHAPTER III

WATCHFULNESS OVER THE HEART, IN ORDER TO THE INSTANTANEOUS SUPPRESSION OF EVIL THOUGHTS

It shall bruise thy head.—GEN. iii. 15.

WE are engaged now in expanding into particulars that counsel of the Divine Master's for the conduct of the spiritual life, which He wrapped up in the single word, "Watch." We saw in our last Chapter that this counsel opens itself out in the inspired precept of the Book of Proverbs, "Keep thy heart above all keeping,"¹ and its context,—that context teaching that each of the avenues is to be kept, by which the heart communicates with the outer world; the sally-port of the tongue ("Put away from thee a froward mouth"), the gate of the senses ("Let thine eyes look right on"), and the sally-port of moral action ("Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established"). We are now to take up each of these points more in detail.

"Keep thy heart with all diligence." The heart is to be guarded against the sallying forth of evil thoughts, whether in the shape of word or action.

¹ Prov. iv. 23 (*marg.*)

Perhaps it might be asked, Why? What is really needed is, it might be argued, that evil thoughts should be altogether killed, extinguished, exterminated ; the mere suppression of them, the merely not allowing them to find vent in the way of utterance, or in the way of action, will simply concentrate and intensify their power. Steam which is allowed no safety valve explodes and works mischief. And angry, proud, or lustful tempers, if they are allowed no indulgence, either in word or action, will only gather intensity, until at length by such suppression they become uncontrollable. It may be worth while to answer this objection before we proceed. First, then, even if it should be allowed that suppressed thoughts and feelings become more intense by suppression, and so far more mischievous to the person harbouring them, it is not of his interests only that we have to think, but of those of his neighbours also. An unprincipled man is prompted by a feeling of hatred and revenge to commit murder. Possibly the wicked feeling might be considerably allayed, at all events it might be tempered, by some relentions of compassion, if the murder were actually committed. But it is plain to every one that no wrong to another person can be justified or excused by the consideration that a bad passion of the wrong-doer has been soothed and appeased by doing the wrong. "None of us liveth to himself";¹ our utterances and our conduct necessarily exercise an influence on those who surround us ; and even supposing that the indulgence of a wrong feeling were to ourselves a moral gain, we should have no right to indulge it at our

¹ Rom. xiv. 7.

neighbour's expense. But the truth is that, though a wrong feeling may be temporarily allayed by its gratification, its permanent power over us, so far from being weakened, is increased thereby. The gratification has riveted another link in the chain of evil habit. The demon of hatred or lust, who seems to have gone out for a time, returns to his house whence he came out, reinforced by other demons, and with a larger mastery over the mansion. And it should be observed also that the suppression of wrong feelings, which we are counselling, is suppression by moral and Christian principle, not by mere external constraint. The man who is restrained from publishing a slander merely by fear of the legal penalty of libel, the man who attends church simply out of deference to the fashion of good society, may be none the better man, none the more virtuous or God-fearing, the one for the restraint upon his tongue, the other for the observance of the ordinance. But it by no means follows from hence that he who curbs his tongue from a sense of duty to his neighbour, and he who goes to church from a sense of duty to God, is not greatly the gainer thereby. The motive, as it changes the moral character of an action, so it also affects its influence upon the doer.

"Keep thy heart," then, "with all diligence," so as to suppress all its evil issues. And what are these evil issues? We will take the statement of them as given by the Divine Master Himself in St. Mark vii., and study it. "There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him" (a position requiring a word, which shall be said in due course, to adjust it with the other equally Scriptural

truth, that evil may find access to man from the world outside him¹); "but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile" (or pollute) "the man."² (Observe the distinct asseveration of our Blessed Lord that the mere passing out from the heart of a wrong thought or a wrong feeling, the merely allowing it to find vent in word or in action, not only exercises an evil influence upon others, but re-acts upon the man himself who gives it passage, and pollutes his moral nature). "For from within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, murders, thefts, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man."³ "Evil thoughts" stand at the head of the black catalogue. The term is a wide and comprehensive one, and will embrace, not only reasonings and doubts, as when "thoughts arose in the hearts of the disciples" as to the reality and palpability of Christ's risen body,⁴—not only unworthy imaginations, as when St. Paul says that the Gentiles, lapsing into idolatry, "became vain in their imaginations,"⁵ but also unworthy feelings and emotions, such as the secular ambition of the disciples, when "there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest."⁶ In all these cases, as in St. Mark vii. 21, the word used in the original is *διαλογισμὸς*,—οἱ. A sceptical suggestion, an impure fancy, a revengeful desire, will all come under the category of "evil thoughts." It is

¹ See below Part III., chap viii.

² Verse 15.

³ Verses 21, 22, 23, R.V. (except that I have taken the Authorised Version of the word *βλασφημία*,—"blasphemy," instead of "railing.")

⁴ See St. Luke xxiv. 38.

⁵ Rom. i. 21.

⁶ St. Luke ix. 46.

observable that most of the words which follow denote sinful actions, and not merely sinful thoughts,—"fornications," breaches of the seventh commandment; "murders," breaches of the sixth; "thefts," breaches of the eighth; "covetings" (for so it should be rendered, the word in the original being in the plural), such acts as Ahab's setting his eyes of envy on Naboth's vineyard,¹ breaches of the tenth; "wickednesses," such acts as the crafty attempt to entangle our Saviour in his talk by the question about tribute to Cæsar, of which attempt it is said, "But Jesus perceived their wickedness";² "an evil eye" of jealousy and dislike, such as that wherewith Saul "eyed David" from the day when the women sang, on his return from the slaughter of the Philistine, "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands";³ "blasphemy," a breach of the third commandment, such acts as that of Sennacherib when he sent Rabshakeh to reproach the living God.⁴ It would seem as if by the four remaining words, "deceit, lasciviousness, pride, and foolishness," our Lord meant rather to indicate some act or acts than merely the state of mind; as, for example, the deceit practised by the old prophet at Bethel upon the man of God that came from Judah,⁵ the lasciviousness of Amnon,⁶ the pride of Nebuchadnezzar,⁷ the foolishness of Rehoboam in rejecting the counsel of the old men.⁸ Anyhow, it is noteworthy that after "evil thoughts" have been mentioned generally as the noxious produce of the heart, different kinds,

¹ See 1 Kings xxi. 2.

² See 1 Sam. xviii. 8, 9.

³ See 1 Kings xiii. 18.

⁴ See Dan. iv. 30, 31.

⁵ See St. Matt. xxii. 18 [*πορνεία*].

⁶ See 2 Kings xix. 3, 4.

⁷ See 2 Sam. xiii. 2, 11, 14.

⁸ See 1 Kings xii. 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, 13, 14.

his people intend to do, and would have done, had they found the opportunity,¹ shall we complain if He acts on a similar principle in the case of the perverse will, and sees in it too the evil deed which it would perpetrate, if it were not fettered by the restraints of human law?

The first thing to be done, then, in the way of keeping the heart, is to watch over its reasonings, its imaginations, its movements of desire. Every train of thought must be challenged and scrutinised before it is indulged in, under the conviction that a wrong frame of mind, even if it does not pass into action, but is simply persisted in, is offensive to God. One or two instances must suffice as examples. Other applications of the same principle the reader will be able to make for himself.

I. That elation of heart, which we are all apt to feel in the consciousness of possessing some gift of God, whether mental or external, some talent, or some special endowment of fortune, is always dangerous. The flattery of friends as to our powers and attainments, however kindly meant, and however acceptable as a mark of their sympathy, augments the danger a hundredfold ; for our hearts are apt to grow turgid and self-complacent on the slightest provocation. But perhaps you may ask, " If God has given me abilities or advantages, which He has denied to others, how can I help being conscious of possessing such abilities and advantages?" You cannot help being conscious of it, but you can suppress by prayer, and looking at the subject from the right side, any undue *elation of spirit*. You can stop your ears

¹ See I Kings viii. 18.

not of evil thoughts, but of evil actions, should be specified. The probable explanation of this circumstance is instructive. The Divine Master would show to his disciples at once the desperate wickedness of the human heart, and the spirituality of God's estimate of sin. Being under the dominion of the senses and of external things, we are apt to be more shocked by criminal deeds than by criminal thoughts. To say that "out of the heart proceed murders" thrills us much more with horror at the heart's depravity, than to say that out of the heart proceed hatreds, though in truth hatred is only murder in germ, as murder is only hatred consummated in act. And again, the Lord would have his disciples know, as He had already taught them in the Sermon on the Mount, that God, the Heart Searcher, sees adultery in the lustful look,¹ and murder in cherished hatred and revenge.² "Whosoever hateth his brother," says the disciple of the Lord of love, following exactly the lines of the Lord's own teaching,—that is, whosoever wilfully admits hatred to the precinct of his heart, not resisting its impulses, but nursing and cherishing them, and pondering the injuries and slights for which the hatred is supposed to be due,—*"is a murderer,"*³—is pronounced a murderer in the court of Heaven, though man's tribunals cannot recognise him as such, has the guilt and stain of murder upon him in the eyes of the Divine Judge. Is this accounted a hard saying? If God accepts the will for the deed in the case of a good action, and accounts that as done in his service, which He sees that

¹ See St. Matt. v. 28.

² See St. Matt. v. 22.

³ 1 John iii. 15.

his people intend to do, and would have done, had they found the opportunity,¹ shall we complain if He acts on a similar principle in the case of the perverse will, and sees in it too the evil deed which it would perpetrate, if it were not fettered by the restraints of human law?

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¹ See 1 Kings viii. 18.

against flattery and discourage it. You can call to mind the fearful and instantaneous judgment which Nebuchadnezzar called down upon himself by his arrogance, when, walking in his palace, he spake and said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the kingdom by the might of my power, and for the honour of my majesty?"¹ and that other still more awful, because irreversible, judgment which Herod, the persecutor of the Church, drew down by the swelling of his heart, when the people gave a shout, as he made his oration to them, "*It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.* And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."² You can secretly bless God for your talent, and confess to Him how little you have hitherto put it out to interest for his glory, and pray for grace to improve it more for the future, so that at the last you may have a good account of it to render in, when the Master cometh and reckoneth with you. If any of God's gifts is realised as his gift, which we received from Him, which we shall have to account to Him for the use of, and which may be withdrawn at any moment, the mere consciousness of possessing it cannot do us the smallest moral harm.

2. When we come across (as, living in the world, we must occasionally come across) displays of wealth and luxury, vast and beautifully situated mansions, sumptuously furnished, gardens which almost deserve to be called paradises of pleasure, and the thought crosses us that this command of worldly resources,

¹ Dan. iv. 30.

² See Acts xii. 21, 22, 23.

so far more than enough for all the wants of the proprietor and his family, is enjoyed by him as an inheritance not toiled for by hand and brain, and the wish rises up in the heart, "Oh that so much of all this lavish plenty had fallen to my lot, that I might be at all events free from the necessity of working for my livelihood, and from anxiety about the future of myself and those who are near and dear to me!" there is spiritual danger in that thought, in that wish, and, if the heart is to be kept with all diligence, the covetous desire must be forthwith resisted. Reflect on the absolutely certain truth, a truth established by the universal experience of mankind, that positions of the greatest affluence and the greatest eminence are usually the most encumbered with cares and responsibilities. Say mentally with the wise man, "When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good *is there* to the owners thereof, saving the beholding *of them* with their eyes?"¹ and then, turning to the Father of thy spirit, say the tenth commandment with its accompanying *Kyrie*, "Lord, have mercy upon me, and incline my heart to keep this law; write this thy law in my heart, I beseech thee." . . . "O turn away mine eyes, lest they behold vanity: and quicken thou me in thy way."²

3. Once more. If you would keep your heart with all diligence, and if your mind has long been made up on the truth of the Christian religion, as set forth in Holy Scripture, interpreted by the Book of

¹ Eccles. v. 11.

² Psalm cxix. 37, P.B.V. Some of the thoughts of this section will be found given more at large, and in a different connexion (that of the temptations which enter through the eye), in Chapter viii. of this Part.

Common Prayer, do not give a moment's harbour either to doubts which may insinuate themselves, or to curious but unpractical questions. When such doubts suggest themselves, say secretly the Collect for St. Thomas's Day. Ground thyself well in the truth, that a religion, whose foundations are laid in doctrines so far above man's reason as the Incarnation and Atonement, must necessarily present many impenetrable mysteries to the human understanding, and that God has purposely left many difficulties in Holy Scripture, by way of proving the humility and the faith of his children. And as to curious questions, which, if solved, would have no practical bearing, and contribute nothing to edification, discipline thy mind by sternly refusing it permission to pursue them. "The end of the commandment," we are told, "is charity out of a pure heart, and *of* a good conscience, and *of* faith unfeigned."¹ The keeping that steadily before thee as thy mark and aim will secure thee from pursuing such speculations as, however interesting, and even provocative to curiosity, do not conduce to that end.

But supposing the evil of a particular train of thought, or at least the dangerous tendency of it, to be detected, one counsel still remains to be given as to the policy to be pursued in suppressing it. That policy is immediate resistance: parley with the evil thought but for a moment, allow it but for a moment to plead for itself, and you are undone. It is not as if we were in a position to try fairly a questionable

¹ 1 Tim. i. 5.

train of thought, holding the balance even between what might be said against, and what in favour of, admitting it. "The infection of nature, which doth still remain, yea, in them that are regenerated,"¹ includes a decided bias to evil, which must necessarily warp the judgment. Therefore, as soon as ever mischief or danger are detected in an evil thought, as soon as ever it becomes clear to the conscience that the devil lurks in it, it must be crushed, —crushed in its earliest germ. For from the very beginning of human history this was indicated as the true policy for defeating the devil. Eve parleyed with him, listened first to his insinuation against God, replied to it with an appearance of candour, and with a show of vindicating her Maker, was replied to by an impeachment of God's truth and goodness, and, admitting that fatal lie of the evil one's, fell an easy prey to him, and did what he solicited.² Her Seed, it was predicted, the Divine-Human Champion who should spring from her, should conduct his warfare against the Evil One in a manner the very opposite of hers. He should bruise the serpent's head, placing his heel upon it.³ In the head of a serpent are its fangs and its venom. And in its head, too, is its vitality. You might sever the body of the reptile, without immediately destroying its life and power of movement ; but crush its head, and you put an end to its existence. And, again, the head of a serpent makes the way, and procures access, for its whole body. Give it but a slight aperture wherein to insinuate its head, and with its wonderful power

¹ Art. ix. *Of Original or Birth-sin.*

² Gen. iii. 1-7.

³ *Ibid.* verse 15.

of convolution it will wreath its folds into the recess where the head has already penetrated. When our Blessed Lord, the Seed of the woman, became sensible of the assaults of the devil, He repelled them instantaneously with "Get thee hence, Satan."¹ St. Peter once spoke smooth things to Him, counselling Him to spare Himself that pain and shame of the Cross, which were by some mysterious necessity indispensable for the salvation of man. Under the soothing and flattering words of the Apostle the Lord detected the venom, which the old serpent thought to instil into his mind, and turning upon him with holy horror and hatred, He said to the organ, through which the devil then spoke to Him, "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."² Our policy must be his, if we would fight successfully against our spiritual foes. The motion of pride, or covetousness, or lust, or doubt, or malice, which is indeed only an instigation of the devil, using our corrupt nature as his instrument and organ, must be instantaneously suppressed. The serpent's head, which contains its venom, must be bruised, and himself thus rendered powerless.

"Am I sufficient for this," thinks the timid soul, "with so strong a bias towards sin as constantly discovers itself in my heart?" The very passage, which indicates that the true method of resisting the devil is by nipping his instigations in the bud, furnishes the answer. For it is the Seed of the woman, and He alone, who can bruise the serpent's head. The victory over sin won by the weakest saint is in truth

¹ See St. Matt. iv. 10.

² See St. Matt. xvi. 22, 23.

the victory of Christ working in him, teaching his hands to war and his fingers to fight. It is the grace of Christ, or (to say the same thing in other words) the grace of God through Christ, which both gives to the will the first impulse to resist, and then confirms it in its resistance ; as it is said, " I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."¹ Therefore, when by thy watchfulness thou becomest sensible of the movement of the evil one in thy heart, pray at once to Him, who counsels us in temptation both to " watch and pray ;" " O Lord Jesus, who hast gloriously defeated the devil for me in thy Fasting and Temptation, in thine Agony and bloody Sweat, in thy Cross and Passion, and thy precious Death, defeat him now in me, that thy triumph may be consummated." Wait upon Him thus in prayer, laying thy will at his feet, that He may use it as his weapon. And it shall be to thee in due time according to that sure promise, " The God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."²

¹ Phil. iv. 13.

² Rom. xvi. 20.

CHAPTER IV

WATCHFULNESS OVER THE TONGUE, AGAINST BREACHES OF THE THIRD COMMANDMENT

Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth ; keep the door of my lips.—

PSALM cxli. 3.

AMONG the many evidences of David's spirituality of mind which his Psalms exhibit, his desire to be guarded against sins of the tongue, and his thorough understanding of the way in which alone such guardianship can be achieved, are perhaps the foremost. It is hopeless, in the first place, he teaches us, to keep the door of the lips *without a strong purpose to keep it*. This strong purpose he professes himself to have made in two other Psalms, both of which, like the hundred and forty-first, are ascribed to him as their author. Thus he speaks in the thirty-ninth Psalm : " I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue" (observe the Psalmist's consciousness that circumspectness in a man's walk or conduct is tested by his refraining from sins of the tongue, quite agreeing with what St. James says, " If any man offend not in word, the same *is* a perfect man, *and* able also to bridle the whole body"¹) : " I

¹ St. James iii. 2.

will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me"¹ (and to those who sojourn in the world, as it is God's will that his people should do, contact with the wicked is unavoidable). And again in Psalm xvii. : "Thou hast tried me, *and* shalt find nothing:" (nothing emphatically ; not only nothing in action, but nothing in words ; for he immediately adds), "I am purposed *that* my mouth shall not transgress"² (how evidently was he conscious that sins of the tongue are no such slight matters as men esteem them, that for every idle word an account will have to be rendered !³) But David was well aware that, in order to the government of the tongue, not only was strength of purpose necessary, but that the purpose should be "strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might ;"⁴ for, conscious that he is all unable himself to govern his tongue, he implores God in the passage which stands at the head of this Chapter to undertake the guardianship of it. He had just been asking for the acceptance of his prayers at a time when he was in banishment, and precluded from access to the house of God ; "Let my prayer be set forth before thee *as* incense ; *and* the lifting up of my hands *as* the evening sacrifice." And then it seems to strike him that, if his prayer was to find acceptance, there must be between it and the words spoken by him in social intercourse no inconsistency of tone, no cursing of men with those lips, which had just been used for the blessing of God ;⁵ so he adds, "Set a watch, O LORD, before my mouth" (I am

¹ Psalm xxxix. 1.

³ See St. Matt. xii. 36.

⁵ St. James iii. 9.

² Psalm xvii. 3.

⁴ See Eph. vi. 10.

unequal to so arduous a task myself); "keep the door of my lips."¹ What an interesting illustration have we, in David's method of governing his tongue, of the compatibility—nay, I should rather say the mutual interdependence and interaction—of man's endeavour and God's grace, the same lesson which the Apostle teaches, when he bids the Philippians "work out their own salvation with fear and trembling," because it was God that wrought in them "both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure."²

And now to resume in a few words the course of our argument.

We are expanding the spiritual counsel, which our Blessed Lord gave to his disciples in the course of his Agony, that they should "watch." Following out this counsel into its details, as traced in the fourth chapter of the Book of Proverbs, we have seen that the heart is to be kept with all diligence at each avenue of access to it. We considered in our last Chapter that watchfulness over the thoughts, which constitutes the keeping of the heart; and now we come to the guarding of the avenue of the tongue, the first of those enumerated by the wise man in the passage referred to.

Now the duty of watchfulness over the tongue has evidently both a negative and a positive side. We must watch *against* evil words, so as not to allow them to escape from our mouth. But this is not enough. We must watch also for the opportunity of saying *good* words. The Apostle mentions both sides of the duty in the same breath in the Epistle to the Ephesians; "Let no corrupt communication

¹ Psalm cxli. 2, 3.

² See Phil. ii. 12, 13.

proceed out of your mouth, but such as is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.”¹ These then will be the two great divisions of our present subject.

But before we enter upon the consideration of the first of them, we must know clearly what are good words and what evil,—what criterion we are to apply in discriminating the good from the evil. And here we must recur once again to the passage in the Book of Proverbs, which prescribes the watching of the heart at the avenue of the tongue. The words are; “Put away from thee a froward mouth, and perverse lips put far from thee.”² “A *froward* mouth,” “*perverse* lips;”—these words, “froward,” “perverse,” give the idea of something which does not subserve the uses for which it was made, something perverted from that which is its true end. And so arises the question, for what end was language given to man, what objects was it designed to subserve? The answer is, first, that it was meant to be the instrument of blessing and praising God, as it is written; “O Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise.”³ A tongue so

¹ Eph. iv. 29. *πρὸς οἰκοδομὴν τῆς χηλῆς* must have the sense given to it in the Revised Version, which therefore I have substituted for “the use of edifying” of the Authorised. Prebendary Meyrick, in *The Speaker’s Commentary*, aptly quotes St. Jerome; “To edify the hearers according as place, time, and person require.”

² Prov. iv. 24.

³ These well-known words of Psalm li. 15 are a prayer in the original Hebrew. The future tense, into which our Prayer Book throws the first clause (“Thou shalt open my lips, O Lord”), comes from the Vulgate, “Domine, labia mea aperies”; and that from the Septuagint, *Κύριε, τὰ χεῖλη μου ἀνοίξεις*. So the words stood in the Sarum Breviary; “Domine, labia mea aperies.” The Compilers of the First Prayer Book of Edward VI. [1549], however, made the suffrage a prayer, giving the words exactly as they were afterwards given in the Authorised Version

employed is employed aright, and words of this character are good words. Secondly, the tongue was designed to benefit men; and this either by directly edifying and instructing them; or by the communication of confidences between man and man, and so the establishment of a more perfect sympathy than without such communication would be practicable; or lastly (and this is not to be overlooked), by entertaining and recreating their spirits under the wear and tear, the manifold burdens and sorrows of life. A word, which is the means of doing any one of these three things, does more or less effectively the work for which words were intended; and therefore is not what our Lord censures as "an idle word;"¹ for an idle word, like an idle person, is a word which does nothing, or at all events nothing good and useful, promotes neither God's glory, nor man's welfare, spiritual, intellectual, or social.

The characteristics of good and evil words having been thus explained, we enter now upon the consideration of watchfulness against evil words, which is the negative side of the duty of governing the tongue. And here first we observe that the Moral Law, the Law of the Ten Commandments, contains a prohibition of wrong words in each of its tables, forbidding wrong words against God in its first, and wrong words against man in its second table, in accordance with what has been just said about

of 1611. In the Second Book of Edward [1552], in view of the worship of the Church being public, the plural was substituted for the singular:

"O Lord, open thou our lips.

Answer.

And our mouth shall shew forth thy praise."

¹ See St. Matt. xii. 36.

the double end for which language was given, the furtherance of God's glory, and of man's welfare. The precept prohibitory of wrong words against God is this ; "Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain ; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain."¹ That prohibitory of wrong words against our neighbour is as follows ; "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour."² The first of these prohibitions is enough to occupy us in the present Chapter.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain." The extreme form of the sin forbidden in these words is perjury, or swearing by the name of God falsely, of which Archbishop Secker justly says that it is "one of the most shocking crimes of which we can be guilty. . . . In other sins, men endeavour to forget God ; but perjury is daring and braving the Almighty to his very face ; bidding him to take notice of the falsehood that we utter, and do his worst."³

As, however, seriously-minded Christians who earnestly desire to live good lives, (and for such persons only are these counsels intended), are in little or no danger of falling into so grievous a crime, we need say no more on this point, and may pass on to such lower forms of the sin of taking God's name in vain as are likely to entrap us in our ordinary social intercourse, wherever no watchfulness is exercised over the words of the mouth.

1. The first is the habit of making unduly strong

¹ Exod. xx. 7 ; Deut. v. 11. ² Exod. xx. 16 ; Deut. v. 20.

³ *Lectures on the Catechism of the Church of England.* Lecture XX., "Third Commandment."

asseverations in conversation, whether from impatience under contradiction, or merely from natural impetuosity and heat of spirit. It should be our aim to eschew all words, even though not literally containing the name of God, which are merely thrown out with the view of giving emphasis to what we assert, deny, or feel. For is anything less than this consistent with our Blessed Lord's expansion of the Levitical precept against perjury in his Sermon on the Mount; "But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. . . . But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil"¹—a prohibition which is repeated in so many words by the Apostle St. James, who prefaces it with a warning as to its supreme importance; "Be patient," he says. "Behold, we count them happy which endure."² But even if you find it difficult under troubles and afflictions to possess your souls in patience, at all events let not your inward irritability find vent in outward expression. "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and *your* nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation."³ The thorough fulfilment of such precepts as these is not to be achieved but by the

¹ St. Matt. v. 34, 35, 37.

² See James v. 7, 8, 11.

³ James v. 12. "The passage," says Dean Plumptre in 'The General Epistle of St. James, with Notes and Introduction' (*Cambridge Bible for Schools*), "presents so close a parallel with St. Matt. v. 33-37 that it is almost a necessary inference that St. James, if not himself a hearer of the Sermon on the Mount, had become acquainted with it as reported by others."

cultivation all day long of a serene, calm, reasonable state of mind, through constant realisation of the Divine presence, and through frequent thoughts of God, his power, his wisdom, his magnificence, his ineffable love. Not till "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding,"¹ takes full possession of our hearts, shall we attain such a holy calm of spirit as shall make intemperance of language out of the question. Very gradual is the road to such an attainment; and meanwhile we must be content to reach out towards it, by saying very often in the secret of our heart; "Thou, God, seest me,"² and by exposing to Him all our felt wants and wishes, while we commit ourselves in full assurance of faith to the orderings of his Providence.

2. The tongue must be guarded against all irreverent use of Holy Scripture. "Thou hast magnified thy word," says the Psalmist, "above all thy name."³ The name of God is that by which He is made known, that which serves to indicate his character and attributes. Thus the whole realm of Nature is part of his name, displaying, as it everywhere does, his power, wisdom, and beneficence, according to that word of the nineteenth Psalm; "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork." Now the passage just quoted of the

¹ See Phil. iv. 7.

² Gen. xvi. 13.

³ Psalm cxxxviii. 2. Probably the particular "word" alluded to is the word of promise to David respecting his Son's everlasting throne (2 Sam. vii. 13); but when we consider that Christ, the offspring of David "according to the flesh," is the theme of Holy Scripture throughout, the theme of the Law, and the Prophets, and the Psalms (See St. Luke xxiv. 44), no less than of the New Testament, we may reasonably—nay, we must—give to the term "thy word" a more extended application.

hundred and thirty-eighth Psalm teaches that the revelation of God by means of his word is the most glorious revelation of Himself which He has condescended to make. And this is true, not only of the Personal Word, the Lord Jesus Christ, who is "the brightness of the Father's glory, the express image of his person,"¹ but also of the written Word, the volume of the Old and New Testament, which is "given by inspiration of God,"² and is the special organ of his Spirit. We must therefore regard it as specially sacred, and refrain from using it, however great be the temptation to do so, to point a witticism and elicit a laugh. Jests connected with passages of Holy Scripture, and investing such passages with ludicrous associations, have this great inconvenience (to say the least of them), that whenever the passage occurs in our devotional reading, or is quoted in our hearing by the preacher, the association still clings to it, and disturbs that solemnity of feeling which we are striving at that moment to cherish. And I must add that it is not merely the words of Holy Scripture of which we should avoid speaking jocosely, but also those awful realities of the spiritual world of which it testifies. Hell, Satan, holy angels, and their guardianship,—these subjects are sometimes introduced with levity into conversation by people right-minded in the main, as if the existence of such persons or things were a fiction of the human fancy, a dream of superstition discarded by a civilised and enlightened age. It is true, of course, that certain gross, material conceptions of the evil one, which took their rise in the superstitions

¹ Heb. i. 3.

² 2 Tim. iii. 16.

of the dark ages, but are utterly without one syllable of sanction in Holy Scripture, have been handed down to the present day, when they have become nothing more than bugbears to terrify children and perhaps the most ignorant of the peasantry; and it might perhaps be pleaded that to see the grotesqueness of these conceptions, and hold them up to ridicule, does not imply any doubt of the personality and power of evil spirits. But caricature, however monstrous and grotesque it be, throws ridicule upon the man of whom it is a caricature, and surrounds him with ludicrous associations. And as Holy Scripture everywhere represents the evil one as an awful power in the spiritual world,—nay, as the most awful of the powers arrayed against us, heading up in his accursed personality the opposition to God, which discovers itself in the world around us and in the corrupt heart within (“We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places”¹)—we surely should not for a moment encourage in ourselves and others anything but the gravest and most serious thoughts and apprehensions in connexion with a subject so truly terrific and so very concerning.

Let us watch over our tongues, then, and keep them as with a bridle in regard to any light treat-

¹ Eph. vi. 12. See above (Vol. I. Part iii. chap. i. p. 240 *et seq.*), the explanation of the Apostle's denial that the Christian wrestles against flesh and blood, which must be understood comparatively; “I would rather point you to your spiritual opponents, who instigate the opposition of flesh and blood, than to the instrumentality which they make use of. It is there the enmity culminates, and finds its incentive.”

ment either of Scriptural language or of any of the spiritual realities of which Scripture gives us assurance; and thus let us magnify God's Word by the reverence in which we hold it. It may help us in yielding this reverence to Holy Scripture, to consider how greatly we should be shocked by any desecration of the material objects which are used in the service of religion. How intolerable should we esteem it to be to turn a church into a dining-room for a secular entertainment ("What? have ye not houses," cries the Apostle, "to eat and to drink in?"¹), or, Belshazzar-like,² to use the chalice of the Eucharist at our common meals as a drinking-vessel! But are the language and the verities of Holy Scripture less worthy of deep reverence than our houses of prayer, or our Eucharistic vessels? Nay, how sadly are we under the empire of our senses, even in our holy things! that which we can see and handle we willingly recognise as sacred; but as for the words which convey saving truth to the mind, we can sport with them and freely use them to raise a laugh. But God hath magnified his word *above all his name*, and hath instructed us that He does so.

3. A want of attention to the words which we use in prayer is more or less, according to the measure of it, a taking of God's name in vain, and to be guarded against only by watchfulness over the tongue, and over the mind. If it were not that it is so easily and so commonly done, there is something which would shock us very greatly, and seem to us horribly profane, in adopting the attitude of prayer, and using its language, without at least making an

¹ 1 Cor. xi. 22.

² See Dan. v. 2, 3.

effort to send our minds and hearts along with the words which our mouths are reciting, or which we are pretending to bear a part in mentally. Set forms of prayer there must be, and set times at which those forms must be offered ; but there can be no doubt that the use of such forms, and the observance of such times, requires special guardedness in one who desires to shun the sin of irreverently taking up sacred words into his lips. Every attendance at church or at family prayer, every saying of prayers in one's own chamber, which is allowed to lapse into a lip-service, is surely a sin against the Third Commandment. " Which is allowed—wilfully and deliberately allowed—to lapse into a lip service." I do not, because I cannot, say more than that. When the set time comes round for prayer, it may be, and often is, the case that the mind is depressed by the bodily temperament, by weariness, possibly, or some constitutional cause, and finds it a hard struggle to raise itself up to communion with God. All that I am now saying is that, if we would avoid taking God's name in vain, the mental torpor must not be acquiesced in, the struggle must be made. Call one or two stirring considerations to your aid. It is no mere piece of mental taskwork which is before you ; your purpose is to hold communion with the Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Love ; can you do this, or even attempt this, without coming away from the exercise brighter, calmer, happier, stronger against evil ? Again ; may it not be that the fact of your praying against difficulties with a dry mind, and in spite of resistance from the flesh, will make your prayer more acceptable than if it had seemed to fly to

heaven upon the wings of a strong religious emotion ? "Dried rose-leaves," St. Francis of Sales says in his Chapter on spiritual dryness and barrenness,¹ "emit a stronger scent than those petals of the rose, which are fresh and glistening with the morning dew." When people break through great difficulties, and make strong efforts to draw nigh to their Saviour, He is wont to crown their importunity with some signal blessing ; as, when of old they broke up the roof, and let down the poor paralytic for whom they sought relief into the midst before Him, He had a word of absolution as well as of healing for the sufferer ; "Son, be of good cheer ; thy sins be forgiven thee."² Make a vigorous effort to throw your whole soul into some very short petition, a "Lord have mercy upon me," or, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise," and the spirit of inertness and heaviness shall be exorcised, and thou shalt have a relish for the more substantial petitions which follow. But if not, and thy mind be dry to the end, do not disquiet thyself. If only thou makest a sincere effort to draw near to God, all shall be well. He sees that thou hast a will to pray, and accounts the will for the deed.

4. Rashness in making vows,—the making them

¹ "C'est donc un grand abus de plusieurs, et notamment des femmes, de croire que le service que nous faisons à Dieu sans goust, sans tendreté de cœur, et sans sentiment, soit moins agréable à sa divine majesté, puis qu'au contraire *nos actions sont comme les roses, lesquelles bien qu'estant fraiches elles ont plus de grace, estant neantmoins seiches, elles ont plus d'odeur et de force.* Car tout de mesme, bien que nos œuvres faictes avec tendreté de cœur nous soient plus agréables, à nous, dis-je, qui ne regardons qu'à nostre propre delectation ; si est-ce qu'estant faictes en seicheresse et sterilité, elles ont plus d'odeur et de valeur devant Dieu." [*Vie Devote*, Quatrième Partie, Chapitre xiv. Œuvres Complètes (Lyon, Paris, 1859), tome i. p. 646.]

² St. Matt. ix. 2 ; See also St. Mark ii. 3, 4 ; St. Luke v. 19.

without due consideration and a serious purpose of fulfilling them,—is a breach of the Third Commandment, against which the tongue has to be guarded. “Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter *any* thing before God. . . . When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it ; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools : pay that which thou has vowed. Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.”¹ And certainly in these days, when celebrations of the Holy Communion are so multiplied, and the great privileges of that holy sacrament are so highly extolled, while we hear comparatively so little of the responsibilities which it involves, it is quite well that we should distinctly recall, as often as we receive it, this more or less forgotten aspect of the ordinance, that each reception of it is a renewal of the baptismal vow ; and that we bind ourselves thereby as with a *sacramentum*, or military oath, to be true and faithful to the great Captain of our salvation, “and to fight manfully under his banner against sin, the world, and the devil, and to continue Christ’s faithful soldier and servant unto our life’s end.”² The Holy Communion is the highest ordinance of our religion, and, where duly partaken of, the most blessed in its effects, and for this reason it deserves to be received with the utmost veneration, with religious awe as well as joy, as it is said, “Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with trembling.”³ And to this reverent reception of it

¹ Eccles. v. 2, 4, 5.

² Baptismal Offices. Sentence of admission of the baptized infant or adult “into the congregation of Christ’s flock.”

³ Psalm ii. 11.

a serious consideration beforehand of the obligations, under which we lay ourselves anew every time that we communicate, is likely to contribute not a little.

Let it be considered, finally, that our imbibing intelligently and cordially the *sanction* of the Third Commandment, "The Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain," will be one of the best securities for our observance of the precept. It needs much and deep consideration to reclaim us effectually from that estimate of sinful words which we form by nature, and to bring us round to the point of view under which they are presented to us in Scripture, and under which God and Christ regard them. Language is the lofty prerogative of rational creatures. It is the instrument both of edification and of praise, according to that precept of the Apostle's, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom ; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (here is the edification of man), "singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord"¹ (here is the praise of God expressed by the same faculty, the tongue, as that which is employed in edifying man). To use this high faculty for the purposes either of profane talking, or of slandering others, or of tempting them into sin, is a direct perversion of the noblest faculty of our nature, of that which stands in closest connexion with the reason, being indeed reason's organ and expression. It is by considerations such as these, laid to heart and prayed over, that we shall be gradually enabled to understand how, while man accounts of words as

¹ Col. iii. 16.

mere idle breath, which passeth away and cometh not again, and is naturally ready to excuse even wrong words, if only the actions and sentiments be right, Prophets and Apostles take the most serious and austere view of sins of the tongue, and none more serious and austere than our Lord Himself, who solemnly assures us that not only for every bad, untruthful word, every word in contradiction to the convictions of the mind, but "for every idle word," that is, for every word which contributes nothing whatever towards any of the objects for which the faculty of language was given, "men shall give account thereof in the day of judgment."¹ Must not the Heavenly Judge Himself know what shall be the proceedings of his own court?

¹ St. Matt. xii. 36.

CHAPTER V

WATCHFULNESS OVER THE TONGUE, AGAINST BREACHES OF THE NINTH COMMANDMENT

Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.—

EXODUS xx. 16.

WE are at present unfolding the duty of watchfulness against wrong words. Wrong words are either such as are profane towards God (violations of the Third Commandment) or slanderous towards man (violations of the Ninth). The first class of wrong words came under consideration in our last Chapter. The second class will engage our attention in this.

“Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.” This is the last of the various forms of doing injury to those around us, which the precepts of the Second Table forbid. We are to respect our neighbour’s position in society, not to injure him in regard of his station—this is what the Fifth Commandment prescribes. We are to respect his person, not to injure his bodily life or health—this is the Sixth Commandment. We are to respect his domestic ties, not to injure him in his affections—this is the Seventh Commandment. We are to respect his possessions, not to injure him in his property—this

is the Eighth Commandment. And, finally, we are to respect his reputation and good name, not to injure him in his character—this is the Ninth.

The extreme form of the sin denounced by this Commandment is the bearing false witness against our neighbour in a court of justice. And as evidence in courts of justice always has to be given upon oath, the bearing false witness in a court involves the sin of perjury, which is a violation of the Third Commandment. So that by one and the same act of false witness a monstrous insult is offered to God, while at the same time a monstrous wrong is done to man. It is well to be reminded how intimately our duty towards our neighbour is bound up with our duty towards God,—the ground and reason of which is that our relation to God as his children carries with it our relation to other men as our brethren, according to that word of Christ's; "All ye are brethren. And . . . one is your Father, which is in heaven."¹

But without dwelling further on the crime of bearing false witness in a court of justice, which all good Christians abhor, and to which there are scarcely any temptations in the course of ordinary life, let us come to the bearing of false witness in conversation, which is one of the commonest of sins, and into which, without constant guardedness over the tongue, we are all apt to slide daily.

Now the first point to impress our minds with, in order to the exercise of this constant guardedness, is the very serious injury we may do to another person by merely damaging his reputation in the society in

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 8, 9.

which he moves. Our admirable Catechism, in the answer as to our duty towards our neighbour, which perhaps is the gem of the whole Catechism, exhibits this injury in a very striking form. "My duty towards my neighbour," the catechumen is instructed to say, "is . . . to hurt no body by *word* nor deed." Now it is clear to those who look into this answer, and go a little below the surface of it, that in this particular clause what was to be expected from the writer was a paraphrase of the Sixth Commandment, "Thou shalt do no murder," because the writer has just concluded his paraphrase of the Fifth Commandment with the words which immediately precede this clause, "To order myself lowly and reverently to all my betters." Having done with the Fifth, Cranmer (or whoever else drafted this part of the Catechism) proceeds to the Sixth, "Thou shalt do no murder." And had he written no more than this, "To hurt no body by *deed*," we should have quite understood that his mind was occupied with the Sixth Commandment and no other; for the most serious form, in which we can hurt our neighbour by deed, is murder. But it seems to have struck him immediately that a murder may be committed with the tongue,—not indeed the murder of a man's body, but of his fair fame and reputation,—and this thought was for the moment so preponderant that, in arranging his words, he placed the murder of a man's reputation (a sin committed every day, and often with a light heart on the part of the person committing it) before bodily murder (an offensive and revolting crime, rarely committed in civilised countries), and wrote, "To hurt no body by *word* nor deed." The course

of his thoughts may be illustrated by a very striking passage of St. Francis of Sales's *Introduction to a Devout Life*, where he is speaking of the sin of detraction. "Slander is a kind of Murther ; for we have three Lives, the Spiritual, which consists in the Grace of God ; the Corporal, which is in the Soul ; and the Civil" (perhaps we might call it the social), "which consists in our Good-Name : Sin deprives us of the first, Death of the second, and Detraction of the third. But a slanderer by one Blow of his Tongue commits ordinarily three Murthers ; he kills his own Soul, and his, that hears him, by a Spiritual Homicide, and takes away the Civil Life from him whom he slanders ; for (as *S. Bernard* says) he that detracts, and he that hearkens to the Detractor, both of them have the Devil about them ; for the one hath him in his Tongue and the other in his Ear. *They have whet their Tongues like Serpents*, says *David*, speaking of Detractors : Now the Serpent's Tongue is fork'd (as *Aristotle* says), and so is that of a Detractor, who at once stings and poysons the Ear of the Hearer and the Reputation of him whom he slanders."¹ If the above parallel between corporeal, spiritual, and civil murder be imbibed and laid to heart, it will surely do something to fence our lips against words of detraction and slander. Bodily murder is a foul crime indeed, the perpetrator of which is justly and universally execrated and loathed. And bodily life is so much prized, that we think it no hardship to be required to take all due precautions for the security

¹ *Introduction to a Devout Life*, Written originally in *French*, by *S. Francis de Sales*, Bishop and Prince of *Geneva*. Faithfully rendered into *ENGLISH*. [London, 1686.] Pp. 440, 441. Part III. chap. xxix.

of our neighbour's life and health. Spiritual life is of so great concern, that our minds can without much difficulty follow our Lord's awful censure of those who inveigle others into sin, which cuts it short ; " It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and *that* he were drowned in the depth of the sea."¹ And if our civil life, which stands in our good name, be not of such vital concern as these, yet nevertheless it is a life which it hurts us sorely to be deprived of, for we have all naturally so great a regard for men's opinion, that nothing grieves us more than to be set lower in their estimate of our character.

We have seen how pregnant with thought is that very brief clause of the "duty towards our neighbour"; "To hurt no body by word nor deed." But this is not all, nor indeed the chief part of what the answer says in explanation of the Ninth Commandment, which has a clause all to itself lower down ; "To keep my tongue from all evil speaking, lying, and slandering." Here we trace three grades of sins of the tongue, the first being the least serious, and the last the most so. Moreover, the last, when analysed, is seen to be compounded of the first and the second ; for what is slandering but evil speaking joined with lying, the bearing witness against our neighbour when the witness is false? Observe, however, that evil speaking by itself, even when not aggravated by being false, is sinful, and one of those things from which the tongue is to be restrained. But why, it may be asked, if my neighbour indisputably has certain faults of character and conduct, am I precluded from

¹ St. Matt. xviii. 6.

mentioning them in conversation? If he have done something manifestly wrong, why may I not tell of it? Because it is so very difficult, so almost impossible, to tell of it with perfect fairness, so as to give a really just view of his action. We tell of our neighbour's faults, but we ignore the excuses which they may have had in his previous life or peculiar temptations; and thus what we say becomes *false* witness, since we do not exhibit at the same time the extenuating circumstances which as a fact reduced the dimensions of the guilt. But again, it is said that "love" (or charity) "covereth all sins."¹ It is the instinct and habit of love, which is the highest grace of the Christian character, to do so. God is the great Coverer of sins, who, according to the beautiful symbolism of the ark in the Holy of Holies, has the Law, which condemns the sinner, hidden from his eyes by the mercy-seat of Christ's atonement;² and man, so far as by grace he reproduces in himself the image of his heavenly Father, will be a coverer of sins also. But so far from being a coverer of sins, I become an exhibitor of them, if, as soon as I am made aware that my neighbour has committed sin, I run into society open-mouthed, and there blab and blurt it out. By such conduct I prove myself to lack that charity which "covereth sins," seeing that I discover them. Of course there may be reasons which may make it necessary, or even incumbent upon us as a duty, to mention some circumstance to the disadvantage of our neighbour's character or

¹ Prov. x. 12.

² Exod. xxv. 21.—"Thou shalt put the mercy-seat above upon the ark; and in the ark thou shalt put the testimony that I shall give thee."

conduct. Justice and our duty to society, which must always rank above our duty to an individual, might demand of us that we should do so. And even where no crime or violation of human law is in question, it is possible to imagine circumstances, in which the disclosure of our neighbour's faults might become imperative upon us, as where one might see a young and comparatively innocent person yielding to the influence, solicitations, or evil counsel of a villain. In such a case charity, not towards the seducer, but towards the person liable to be led astray by him, would doubtless demand that what we knew and were assured of, as to the villany of the former, should be plainly and roundly made known to the latter. Perhaps it might be taken as a sound general rule that only in cases where charity, either to society at large, or to some one person liable to be misled, demands such a disclosure, might a neighbour's faults of character or conduct be mentioned at all,—that in all other cases they had better be suppressed, at least in general conversation. I say, "at least in general conversation," because, as I hope to show further on, it might strike at the root of that intimate confidence, which ought to subsist between very near relations and friends, to tie up their tongues altogether as to any judgment upon a neighbour's character and conduct. There are some friends so very close to us in the relations of life, that the disclosing to them all we know and feel on every subject is only a species of self-communing.

The next grade of sins of the tongue is "lying"; —"to keep my tongue from all lying." Falsehood,

even where no man's character or fair fame is touched by what we say, is in itself, without the aggravation of evil speaking, a sin. But how, it may be asked, a sin *against our neighbour*? By a *mere* lie, where nothing is said to our neighbour's disadvantage, how is our neighbour injured? It is easy to see that a lie, being a violation of truth, is an offence against the God of truth; but its mischievousness in relation to man, where man is not the subject of the lie, is not so easily understood, and may require a word of explanation. The New Testament prohibition of lying, then, seems to regard this sin exclusively in its social aspect; "Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another."¹ You violate, says St. Paul, that brotherly love which should subsist between members of the same body, you do wrong to your neighbour, if you do not speak truth in your intercourse with him. One of the ends for which the faculty of language is given, is to build up society by establishing a mutual understanding and confidence between man and man. In general we can depend more or less on human testimony; if one witness is mistaken or biassed, others will set him right; whence comes that general rule of evidence; "Out of the mouth of two or three wit-

¹ Eph. iv. 25. "Truth-telling," says Prebendary Meyrick, in the *Speaker's Commentary*, on this passage, "is an essential and fundamental quality of Christian morality, and one cause of the binding nature of the duty is given in the next few words: 'We are members one of another,' as belonging to the family of man, and forming the Christian household, and as such we have a right to truth, not only to words true in the speaker's acceptance of them, while they mislead the hearer, but to *truth*, from our neighbour, and our neighbour from us. On this axiom rests all social trust, and therefore society. Without it there can be no true union civil or ecclesiastical."

nesses shall every word be established.”¹ Only think how often in the intercourse of every-day life we are obliged to trust one another’s word. And imagine how completely the very foundations of society would be subverted, if no reliance could be placed on what any one told us. And this is the end to which lying, practised universally, would tend,—the relaxation of every social bond, and the loss of all confidence in one another. “Nobody could then know,” to use Archbishop Secker’s words,² “on what, or whom, to depend. For if one person may lie, why not another? And at this rate, no justice can be done, no wickedness be prevented or punished, no business go forward.” Truth-speaking is the cement of society, by which it is built up and held together. And every lie contributes in its degree, though it may be but in a small degree, to break up the cement, and to destroy its tenacity.

The inducement which leads people in ordinary conversation to depart from strict truth in representing an occurrence is their desire to say something striking and interesting, something which may impress itself upon the hearers, and gain for the speaker the credit of being what is called “good company,”—an amusing, entertaining person, furnished with a store of lively and telling anecdotes. Now it cannot be denied, I think, that, one of the purposes for which the faculty of language was given being the recreation of the mind, amusing conversation, so long as it is perfectly innocent, and does not trench in any

¹ Deut. xvii. 6; xix. 15, with our Lord’s citation of it, St. Matt. xviii. 16; St. John viii. 17, and St. Paul’s citation of it, 2 Cor. xiii. 1.

² *On the Catechism.* Lecture xxvii.

degree upon forbidden topics, is a thing which, at fitting times and places ("there is a time to laugh," says the wise man, as well as "a time to weep"¹), is to be encouraged. But there are two restrictions which must be observed by way of maintaining its innocence, and which, without constant watchfulness over the tongue, cannot be observed. The first is restriction as to the measure of such conversation. In all the enjoyments which are permitted to him the true Christian will study moderation. Temperance will be his rule throughout, not only in eating, drinking, and sleeping, but also in pleasures of a higher character, whether derived from art or literature, or, as in the case before us, from some form of social intercourse. However abstractedly innocent his recreation may be, the time devoted to it must not be unduly long; and as to conversation, the more he is endowed for it, and the more ready and fluent he is in joining in it, so much the more will he have to be on his guard against that undue talkativeness, which selfishly engrosses the whole conversation to itself, and demands to be listened to, while it is unwilling to listen. I suppose there is no spiritually-minded person who has not felt at times that while talk, used in moderation, cheers the spirits and lightens the burdens of life, an over-abundance of it is apt to waste the spiritual strength, to relax the will, to slacken the resolution, and to dissipate the mind from those thoughts which should be ever present to it,—the Presence of God, and the possible nearness of death and judgment.

The other restriction very necessary to be observed,

¹ Eccles. iii. 4.

if we desire to keep our conversation innocent, is to deny ourselves in any narration the slightest deviation from literal matter of fact, under the idea that, if we allowed ourselves in such deviation, we should create a greater interest in the hearers. I am retailing what some one has told me, which is sufficiently marvellous and interesting, but which I am myself acquainted with only at second hand. Suddenly one of the company turns round on me, and says, "Did you really see that or hear that yourself?" The temptation is to say I did, by way of augmenting the wonderfulness of the occurrence, or rather of giving the hearers a greater assurance of its truth. But as a Christian child may not tell a lie to screen himself from punishment, so a Christian man may not tell one to create a sensation. The truth, the strict literal matter of fact, is due from me to my hearers, whenever I profess to be telling them a true story. And to deviate from the truth knowingly in the slightest degree is to do them a wrong, and to betray the confidence, which they show by their readiness to receive my word, that they repose in me.

From what has been said respecting evil speaking and lying, the two lower grades of sins of the tongue, it may be easily concluded how very grave a sin is slandering, combining, as it does, in one and the same offence, both detraction from our neighbour and falsehood, and thus having in it a double virus.

If, now, it be asked as to the method of freeing conversation from these faults of detraction and untruthfulness, which so commonly attach to it, and

make it so unwholesome in its character, or, at all events, of so low a type, the first and most obvious rule must evidently be to be content to say nothing, when we have nothing either useful or entertaining to say. Men talk about their neighbour's character and conduct mostly for want of a better topic ; but what necessity is there for speaking at all, if nothing offers itself to be said but what is doubtful or dangerous, and in which we may easily trip? And our neighbour's character and conduct are topics of this description, which we shall do well to keep as clear of as we can, and, when they are introduced by others, to try to give the conversation a different turn. Adherence to this rule will throw us back upon the work of stocking our minds with rational and useful subjects of conversation, even a general acquaintance with which may stand us in good stead in an attempt to make conversation useful, at all events, if nothing higher. The great amount of journalism which is a characteristic of our times, and the high tone of some of the leading journals, and the really instructive articles which they often contain on subjects scientific and literary, as well as political, may do good service in this respect. Without studying all that is said on each subject, it takes but a short time to seize the leading points of one or two ; and if we enter into conversation thus furnished, and with a willingness to learn, we may possibly either stir up a new interest in an intelligent and receptive mind, or elicit from those across whom we are thrown some valuable information, and thus be either ourselves the gainers by conversation, or make others so, or both. For let us not forget that if "death is in

the power of the tongue," "life" is in its power also;¹ and that, if it can forge the slander which may ruin, or the seductive words which may entice into sin, it can also convey from man to man the wisdom and knowledge, which instruct the mind and edify the heart.

At the close of a Chapter which has been devoted to the expansion of part of God's Law, with the view of facilitating the practice of it, let me just remind my readers how the love of that law and the delight in it (this love and delight being far in excess of the mere practice of it as a series of rules), is one of the best tests of genuine spirituality of mind. It has been truly said that a man's spirituality of mind may be ascertained by his congeniality or uncongeniality to the sentiments of the hundred and nineteenth Psalm. And yearnings after conformity to God's Law, the Psalmist's appreciation of it, and the high satisfaction which he finds in it, these are the burden of that wonderful Psalm. "O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day,"²—this is the keynote of it, which is ever chiming in with sweet assonance on the ear of the reader. May God, by his Spirit, both enlighten us as to his requirements, and give us a ready, loving will to observe them, not only "putting his laws into our minds," but "writing them in our hearts," according to the terms of the New Covenant, the foundation-stone of which is laid in the free forgiveness of our sins.³

¹ See Prov. xviii. 21.

² Verse 97.

³ See Jer. xxxi. 33, 34, with Heb. viii. 10, 11, 12.

CHAPTER VI

WATCHFULNESS FOR OPPORTUNITIES OF SAYING A WORD IN DUE SEASON

And the Syrians had gone out by companies, and had brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maid ; and she waited on Naaman's wife. And she said unto her mistress, Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria ! for he would recover him of his leprosy. And one went in, and told his lord, saying, Thus and thus said the maid that is of the land of Israel.—2 KINGS v. 2, 3, 4.

WATCHFULNESS over the tongue is that part of the general duty of watchfulness, which at present engages our attention. In our two last Chapters we have considered the words *against* which we are to watch,—words of profaneness, as violations of the Third Commandment ; words of detraction, falsehood, and slander, as violations of the Ninth. But a Christian's duty is not satisfied by refraining from vices ; he must also cultivate virtues ;—nay, it is only by the cultivation of the opposite virtue that the extirpation of a vice can be achieved. As regards the tongue, it must not only be restrained from evil words, but made to utter good ones, according to that precept of St. Paul ; “ Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth ” (here he echoes

the restrictions of the Law, "Thou shalt not take God's name in vain," "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour;" but the *Evangelical* Law is not merely restrictive of evil, but imperative of good; therefore he adds, "but such as is good for edifying as the need may be" (such is the correct rendering of the words, as they are given in the Revised Version), "that it may minister grace unto the hearers."¹ Observe the effect attributed to an edifying word, spoken in due season, which corresponds to the need of the hearers,—what a great effect it is, what a blessed effect,—what a thing to be thankful for, if we have produced such an effect only once in our whole lives—"that it may minister grace unto the hearers." Grace is spiritual life; our spiritual life stands in grace; it is originated by grace; and by grace it is maintained. And of this life-giving, life-preserving grace we are here told that "a word spoken in due season"² may be the vehicle, the means of its conveyance,—"that it may minister grace unto the hearers." I say "a word spoken in due season," not as a stated ordinance, but, as opportunity offers, in the ordinary intercourse of life. For that the Apostle is here speaking of the conduct of daily life, and not of what is called preaching (however well his words may accommodate themselves to this latter) is quite clear from the context, and particularly from the prohibition with which he ushers in the precept, "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth." He is speaking to those who in time past had been "Gentiles in the flesh," heathens plunged in heathen vices, such as lying, perjury,

¹ Eph. iv. 29.

² Prov. xv. 23.

revilings and execrations, thefts, impure and obscene innuendoes in conversation. "Now," says he, "since you have become Christians, all this must be reversed; you must put away these vices, and clothe yourselves with the opposite virtues; you must put away lying, and speak every man truth with his neighbour. You must learn how to put a bridle on your angry tempers, so as to keep them within bounds. The hands must no longer be used in picking and stealing, but in honest industry, and in giving to others some portion of what you acquire by that industry. And as to your mouth, it must not only be purged of ribaldry and corrupting language, but also be made to speak such edifying words as may be a vehicle of grace and life to the hearers." Yes, of life—life spiritual—for life, as well as death, is in the power of the tongue.¹ On the one hand moral poison may be instilled by it in the shape of infidel or licentious thoughts, and thus spiritual death may be spread far and wide. On the other, words of good counsel, holy warning, sympathizing encouragement, may be dropped into the ear, and instil themselves into a soul which needed them, and, under God's blessing, give life to that soul, which in its turn it shall transmit to many others."

The Epistle to the Colossians is traced upon the same lines as that to the Ephesians; and it is very instructive to note how the slight variations made in such passages of the two Epistles as are parallel in their general scope, contribute each of them something to the completeness of the idea which has to be brought out. The precept on the subject of speech in the Epistle to the Colossians runs thus;

¹ See Prov. xviii. 21.

"Walk in wisdom toward them that are without" (those who are not Christians by profession, like yourselves, but across whom, as living in the world, you must be continually thrown,—your conduct towards them, and while they are watching you, will demand the greatest possible discretion and tact, if so be you may in any way win them), "redeeming the time." (The marginal reference in the Revised Version gives the literal and exact translation of these last very important words, "buying up the opportunity;"—the idea is that there is a certain article in the market, for which there will be a demand hereafter, and which some great capitalist may buy up with the view of selling it, when the demand comes, at any price which he chooses to put upon it, and so making a large fortune; the opportunities offered to us in the order of God's Providence of doing good are compared to such an article, and we are earnestly recommended to buy them up, and turn them to the best account; now how is this to be done? By being on the watch to speak a word in due season; for the Apostle proceeds,) "Let your speech *be* always with grace" (or, as it is in the original, "in grace;" if it is "in grace," spoken with and by grace, we may hope that, as he says to the Ephesians, it will "minister grace unto the hearers"), "seasoned with salt" (how entirely consistent is this with the prohibition of "corrupt speech" which he had given to the Ephesians,—salt is that which, rubbed into animal matter, prevents corruption), "that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man."¹ There is present to his mind here, what is

¹ Col. iv. 5, 6.

not found in the Epistle to the Ephesians, a heathen objector to Christianity taking up an attitude of opposition to one of its doctrines, and asking some Christian what he has to say for that Article of the Faith. The Christian must be "ready always to give an answer to one that asketh him a reason of the hope that is in him with meekness and fear,"¹—and the answer must be a telling one, it must have point and pungency in it, like our dear Lord's own answers to the Pharisees, the Sadducees, the Herodians, and every one else who interrogated Him,² it must exactly meet the case and silence the opponent or subdue him.

Let us observe the expression, "that ye may know how ye ought to answer *every man*," literally, "each one." It shows that the answer is to be not a general or abstract one, but adapted by the wisdom dwelling in the Christian, of which the Apostle had made mention above ("Walk in wisdom toward them that are without"), to the individual case. Thus our Lord framed his answers to questions put, or observations made to Him, according to his insight into the mind of the person putting the question or making the observation. In his case, of course, the insight was that of the Divine omniscience and infallible. But the Christian who "walks in wisdom," under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, will acquire a tact in dealing with others, and an insight into their characters, which will direct him as to what they need, and as to the remark which may be helpful in the particular case. "He that is spiritual," says St. Paul, "judgeth all things,"³ echoing what the wise man had said in foregone Scripture; "Evil men

¹ See 1 Pet. iii. 15. ² See St. Matt. xxii. 15 to 41. ³ 1 Cor. ii. 15.

understand not judgment: but they that seek the LORD understand all *things*.”¹ The truth is that the Holy Spirit, wherever a man lives under his influence, gives power to discern, not only Divine Truth, but also human character, as it is said; “The anointing which ye have received of him . . . teacheth you of all things.”² And by this faculty of discernment, or, in other language, by the wisdom that dwelleth in us, the words are to be guided, so as to reach the needs of those whom we come across, and be to them words spoken in due season.

The story of the little maid, who waited on Naaman's wife, exemplifies the possible good result of a word spoken in due season, under a dispensation dim in comparison of that under which we live, and at a time when the assistances of Divine Grace were vouchsafed much less abundantly than they are to ourselves. The little maid was a worshipper of the true God, the God of Israel, though by the ordering of Divine Providence she had become a slave in the household of one of her country's enemies. By way of showing that He had not cast off Israel in consequence of the political schism which had been headed by Jeroboam, God had raised up in the kingdom of the ten tribes that greatest of the Old Testament prophets, Elijah, and in succession to him, and as inheritor of a double portion of his spirit, Elisha. The captive maiden, while she was yet in her country, had heard from many of the miracles which Elisha had done, was doing; how he had reclaimed the soil of Jericho from barrenness;³ how

¹ Prov. xxviii. 5.

² See 1 John ii. 27.

³ See 2 Kings ii. 19 to 23.

he had neutralised poisonous ingredients in pottage,¹—nay, how he had restored the Shunammite's child to his mother when life had become extinct.² The prophet who could recall a soul from the realm of the dead, must also be able to heal disease, which is the incipient form of death. Well; here is her master, a heathen it is true—"an alien from the commonwealth of Israel, and a stranger from the covenants of promise"³—but who probably had been in his dealings with her neither cruel nor licentious, and servitude to whom had been neither galling nor dishonourable to her, for in her only recorded words she expresses a cordial wish for his welfare, and a desire, so far as in her lay, to contribute to it. This master of hers was the victim of a complaint which poisoned the springs of life—a complaint so loathsome that it had been selected by the law of Moses as the type of sin, and was considered among her people as a special mark of the Divine displeasure, and as subjecting its victim to an excommunication from society;⁴ and the case was made all the more pitiable by the eminence which her master had attained, by his gallantry and success in war, and by the marks of royal favour which had been shown him at the Syrian court—all his happiness, his brilliancy, his popularity, seemed to be dashed by the circumstance that he was a leper. Could she, a poor foreign slave in his household, do anything to help him? All she could do would be to watch her opportunity, and to say a word to her mistress, which might reach her master's ear, and direct him to the

¹ See 2 Kings iv. 38 to 42.

² See 2 Kings iv. 18 to 38.

³ See Eph. ii. 12.

⁴ See Lev. xiii. 46; Num. v. 2; xii. 14, 15.

quarter where, as she could not doubt, a remedy for his complaint might be had. She will venture it, albeit she may perchance give offence by referring her master for a cure to the country of an enemy, whom, it is clear, from what he afterwards said, that he held in some contempt.¹ So, the remark possibly being elicited by something her mistress had thrown out as to the drawback to his position of her husband's malady, she said, "Would God my lord *were* with the prophet that *is* in Samaria! for he would recover him of his leprosy." Does it seem a slight and paltry thing to have said, one of those common-place good wishes, of which men are so prodigal when they have no real help to give, and perhaps would not give it if they had? Nay, I am rather inclined to see in these slight and few words, first, an expression of sympathy and real good will, and what are sympathy and real good will but a form of love? and secondly, an expression of faith—faith in the fact that God had raised up to his people in the person of Elisha a great prophet, and was at that time visiting them, if in the way of judgment upon scorners, as in the case of the children torn by the she bears,² so also in the way of mercy and healing towards those who feared him, as in the case of the poison-antidote for the sons of the prophets, and the raising of the Shunammite's child. And are not faith and love, both of which she seems to express, great forces in the world of Providence and in that of grace, so that the appearance of them in her short utterance quite redeems it from triviality?—And observe another point. Though this little maid's

¹ See 2 Kings v. 12.

² See 2 Kings ii. 23, 24, 25.

knowledge was small, and her light dim, we do not find in it anything of that narrowness of Judaism, with which the history of the Gospels has made us so familiar. She quite believes, with the Syrophœnician in after years, that there may be crumbs for the dogs as well as bread for the children,¹ that God's mercy and grace may overflow its regular channel, and drop even upon the Gentiles ; if her master, the worshipper of Rimmon,² were with the prophet that is in Samaria, the prophet, she feels assured, would have a healing for him. And thus I find in this speech an anticipation in practice of New Testament precept. She spake "in wisdom towards them that were without" (the Gentiles), watching for the opportunity, and, when it came, improving it. It was the word in due season, which the occasion demanded, and she said it. And how largely was it blessed ! It did not fall to the ground, that little word ; it was carried to Naaman, it was carried to the Syrian king ; and to both of them it seemed to hold out hope, a hope which, as we know from the sequel, was not frustrated. Naaman was ultimately perfectly restored,—“his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child” (the flesh of the leper was callous, crusted over, putrescent), “and he was clean.”³ But we must look beyond the physical healing, if we would trace the entire effect of that “word spoken in due season.” From his experience of the miracle, Naaman became a convert to the worship of the true God ;—“Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto

¹ See St. Mark vii. 28.

² See 2 Kings v. 18.

³ 2 Kings v. 14.

the LORD."¹ And doubtless, so far as Naaman's influence extended, some knowledge of the true God would be diffused in the heathen realm of Syria. Naaman at the court of the king of Syria would become like the Ethiopian eunuch at the court of Candace² in later times, a centre of light radiating outwards. Very possibly other Syrians under Naaman's influence became proselytes to the religion of the Jews, and by the narrative of his experience came "to trust under the wings of the LORD God of Israel," early members, as Ruth the Moabitess had been a still earlier one,³ of that very important class of people who in later days were destined to be the bridge, by which the Gospel should pass over from the mind of the Jew into that of the Gentile.

The narrative, though an Old Testament one, furnishes a beautiful illustration, in the way of example, of the two New Testament precepts respecting speech which have been considered in the earlier part of the Chapter, and may suggest several useful reflexions of a practical character as to the method of doing good by means of the tongue.

1. There is nobody so humble, no one whose standing and position seem to give him so little influence with others, that he is precluded from being useful in this way. The little maid that waited on Naaman's wife was a slave in a heathen family. Yet a word spoken by her, when opportunity offered, was blessed not merely to the recovery of the great captain from his leprosy, but to the bringing him to an acknowledgment of the one true God.

¹ 2 Kings v. 17.

² See Acts viii. 27, 39.

³ See Ruth ii. 12.

2. Those, who would do the work done by this heathen slave with success similar to that she met with, must address themselves to it in her spirit. The words that are designed to be helpful to others must be animated by *sympathy and good will*. They must be spoken with a real desire to lighten some of the many burdens under which all around us men are groaning,—if not directly to edify in the highest sense, at all events to cheer, brighten, encourage. And be it remembered that where no *direct* help can be given, the mere manifestation of *genuine* sympathy is the greatest *indirect* help, support, and solace.—But again ; *some of this woman's faith is needed, as well as some of her sympathy*, if we would have our words as effective for good as hers were. We must be cordially persuaded and assured (what abundant grounds have we for such assurance in the Gospel of Christ) that the Heavenly Father sympathises with all the burdens which his children have to bear, that He wills not human sin or sorrow, and that in the Son of his love He hath provided sovereign specifics for both. The referring of weary and heavy laden souls to Christ, as the maid referred Naaman for healing to Elisha, is at once the most direct and the highest form, in which it is open to us to benefit the souls of others by words. “ I have myself experienced this mercy, this deliverance from sin's guilt and power, this divine consolation. Come now, and lay down your burden where I have laid down mine. ‘ O taste, and see, how gracious the Lord is.’ ”¹ Not that such directness will be always in place or judicious. Sometimes what may be resented as a

¹ Ps. xxxiv. 8, P.B.V.

liberty, if too explicitly stated, may be insinuated indirectly, and so find acceptance. And, even short of this highest form of help, there may be much help given. Souls, earnest and good and faithful in the main, may yet, for want of realising some particular side of Divine Truth, be walking heavily and gloomily,—"in the fear of the Lord," perhaps, but not "in the comfort of the Holy Ghost."¹ Perhaps it is some very simple truth uniformly admitted, which they at present fail,—not indeed to recognise, but—to realise. And perhaps some very simple person's telling that truth to them in a very simple way may be the means which the Lord shall bless to light up the whole spiritual landscape, and make "the candle of God shine upon their head."²

Occasions of saying words like these, it may be thought, but rarely occur. We should find them much oftener, I believe, if we were on the watch for them. Let us make the reflexion that every soul, across which in the path of life we are thrown, is either altogether unawakened, or in a certain stage of spiritual development; that there must be, corresponding to the condition of that soul, some counsel of God adapted to it, and exactly meeting its needs; that nothing, however apparently trivial, escapes the control of Divine Providence,—not even the most casual meeting with others (it may be entirely without design); that the most commonplace intercourse therefore may bear great possibilities and great issues bound up in its bosom; and the merely imbibing of these thoughts, so as to lay them to heart, will engender in us, if nothing more, cautiousness and considera-

¹ See Acts ix. 31.

² See Job xxix. 3.

tion as to what we say, under the impression that it may be of moment to the hearers. Let it be part of our morning's devotion to anticipate that, in our intercourse with the world that day, opportunities of saying something helpful, either temporally or spiritually, to some one of our brethren, will be, or at least may be, offered. Let us reflect beforehand how happy might be the consequences of our merely arresting one such opportunity ;—" a word *spoken* in due season," let us say to ourselves, " how good *is it !*"¹ Let us seek beforehand the wisdom and the grace to say the suitable word, when the occasion does arrive. Going forth on our daily occupations thus prepared, and animated by faith and sympathy, it will not be long before we discern the opening of which we are in quest, and are enabled to avail ourselves of it. Our " speech " shall be " seasoned with salt," pungent, gracious, adapted to those with whom we have to do, and to the occasion which calls it forth,— " good for edifying as the need may be," and a vehicle of " grace to the hearers."

¹ See Prov. xv. 23.

CHAPTER VII

WATCHFULNESS TO REFRAIN THE LIPS FROM A MULTITUDE OF WORDS

In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin (transgression, marg.): but he that refraineth his lips is wise (doeth wisely, marg.)—PROV. x. 19.

WE are engaged in drawing out into particulars the great duty of Christian watchfulness, on the lines laid down for us in that profound and exhaustive passage of the Book of Proverbs which bids us “keep the heart with all diligence, because out of it are the issues of life,”¹ and which immediately goes on to indicate the three avenues at which the heart is to be kept,—the avenue of the tongue, the avenue of the senses, and the avenue of moral action. Watchfulness over the tongue has been considered under three heads,—watchfulness against breaches of the Third Commandment, watchfulness against breaches of the Ninth, and watchfulness for opportunities of saying a word in due season, which God may bless to the good of the hearers. But the passage which stands at the head of this Chapter reminds us that the duty of watchfulness over the tongue is not exhausted by merely restraining it from evil words, nor even by seizing the opportunities which may offer of uttering good ones—that it must be restrained also from

¹ See Prov. iv. 23.

excess of talk, if the control over it is to be complete,—so complete as to be a perfect and sufficient test of self-control in other departments of the spiritual life. “In the multitude of words,”—poured volubly and thoughtlessly from the mouth—“there wanteth not sin,”—some utterance is sure to escape which is of indifferent quality and questionable tendency,—“but he that refraineth his lips,” simply refraineth them ever and anon, “holding his tongue and speaking nothing,”—“is wise,” or, as the Revised Version gives the passage, “doeth wisely.”

It might seem as if this requirement of moderation and self-restraint in talking, irrespective of the character of what is said, were somewhat stern and rigorous,—a precept more in keeping with the restrictions of the Law than with the liberty of the Gospel. But the New Testament gives not the slightest sanction for any such notion; nay, the tone of the New Testament seems to be even stricter than that of the Old, as to the necessity and importance of curbing all superfluous sallies of the tongue. First, there is the awful censure passed upon idle words by the Heavenly Judge Himself, a censure prefaced by the phrase, “But I say unto you.”¹ This phrase is employed by Christ, as will be seen by a reference to the Sermon on the Mount, to indicate an advance made by the Evangelical Law upon that of Moses in respect of stringency. (Murder, adultery, perjury, were forbidden of old; “but I say unto you”² that God will reckon with you for an angry temper, a lustful look, an unnecessary oath.) The form of words, then, which ushers in the prohibition of the

¹ See St. Matt. xii. 36.

² See St. Matt. v. 22, 28, 34.

idle word indicates a new step made by Gospel morality, in advance of the standard which had been previously accepted, and which our Lord had just referred to. And what He had just referred to was *evil* words,—the scum thrown up to the surface out of an evil heart; “An evil man out of the evil treasure of the heart bringeth forth evil things.”¹ But *my* law, He seems to say, by which ye my disciples shall be judged, forbids not *evil* words only, but *idle* words; “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment.”² As has been previously explained, an idle word, like an idle person (the same Greek word is used in the expostulation with the labourers who were hired into the vineyard at the eleventh hour; “Why stand ye here all the day idle?”³), is a word that does nothing, or nothing that is worth doing; neither edifies, nor instructs, nor carries on the necessary business of life, nor promotes mutual confidence, nor amuses and entertains. It must be freely admitted that in a life so full of toils, burdens, and cares for the many, of tears and troubles sooner or later for all, there must be recreation, or the spirit of man would fail under the strain; and the tongue has been mercifully given by God as an instrument of recreation and refreshment, and the vehicle of sympathetic confidences, an instrument and a vehicle always at hand, and at the command of the humblest as well as the highest. Who knows not the relief, after a hard day’s work, of opening our minds freely to family or friends, of imparting our views, and receiving theirs, on the

¹ St. Matt. xii. 35.² Verse 36.³ St. Matt. xx. 6.

experiences which we and they have met with, the people we have seen, the incidents which have befallen us, trivial they may be in themselves, but having an interest for the parties concerned? Such words cannot be accounted idle in any just moral estimate of them. On the contrary, they fulfil one of the great moral functions of words, the relief of human burdens and the cementing of human sympathies. Yet when the largest allowance has been made for all such talk as lightens life's loads, or brightens its daily routine, there will still remain a large number of words of too frequent occurrence in our ordinary social intercourse, which must in reason be stigmatized as "idle,"—talking for talking's sake, making talk where there is nothing to talk about, or nothing which has not been already said, nay, and perhaps threshed out and exhausted,—and where the minutes so spent might have been redeemed for the purpose of carrying on some of those smaller occupations, which persons who desire to make the best possible use of their time will always have at hand, to fill up the spare corners of their day. Our Lord's condemnation of these "idle words" is evidently only an echo of the wise man's saying that "in the multitude of words there wanteth not sin," and that "he that refraineth his lips is wise." And St. James in yet another form gives the same precept with Solomon. For he speaks of a "religion," which does not lead a man to bridle his tongue, as "vain;"¹ and afterwards, when he deals with the subject of offences in word, compares the tongue to a bit in the horse's mouth, to which the bridle is attached² (so that bit

¹ James i. 26.

² James iii. 3.

and bridle are only different parts of one and the same implement). Now the bit and bridle are not only for the purpose of guiding the horse in his course, but of reining him in and stopping him. And so, when we are bidden to bridle the tongue, and assured that without such habitual bridling all pretence to religion must be abandoned as a piece of self-deception, we are assuredly to understand, not only that the words are to be guided discreetly, guided so as to be useful and not mischievous (though this is indeed an important part of the teaching of the imagery), but also that they are to be held in check, and their impetuosity restrained ; for "in the multitude of words," simply in their multitude, quite apart from their misdirection, "there wanteth not sin ; but he that refraineth his lips doeth wisely."

It is evident then that, whether we have regard to the Old Testament or the New Testament, this duty of curbing the tongue, and, if I may so speak, of cultivating silence occasionally, when we find that conversation is running away with us, is based on Holy Scripture, nay, may I not say that the duty is there prescribed in a very emphatic and unequivocal manner ? And we shall find here, as elsewhere, that reason and the experience of spiritual persons fully confirm the requirements of Holy Scripture.

And, first, reason confirms them. The tongue, as has been already said, is designed to be an instrument, not only of instruction, not only of business, but of recreation also. It is chiefly, though not, I think, exclusively, in the last of these aspects,—that is, as an instrument of recreation,—that it has to be curbed or restrained. Now is it not clear, on

grounds of reason only, even were there no Scriptural precept to this effect, that all forms of recreation must be temperately used, and in moderation? In our present condition of existence, recreation, both of body and mind, is not only allowable, but (let it be conceded to the fullest extent) absolutely necessary to the healthy action of our faculties. The lowest and most indispensable forms of recreation are those refreshments of food and sleep, which are daily required in order to hold the bodily frame together. Here it will be universally admitted that temperance must be observed, on this, if on no higher ground, lest the recreation should defeat its own end, which is that of fitting the body for work and active service. We may eat and drink too much; we may sleep too long; and thus, so far from fitting the body for service, may make it actually unfit, sluggish, torpid, inactive. Similarly, in all the forms of mental recreation,—which, be it observed, are as necessary to give tone and vigour to the mind as food and sleep are to keep the body in health,—temperance is the law which reason, as well as Holy Scripture, imposes. What are we to think of a man, who does nothing but amuse himself with various pastimes all the day long, to the neglect of serious business of any kind, to the neglect of work for any useful or good end? However innocent the forms of amusement in which he indulges, however suitable they may be when taken in moderation, we must say, in any fair moral estimate of his conduct, that the man, in giving himself wholly up to them, is *doing wrong*; that the great object of amusement is to enable work to be better done—done with greater

spirit, vigour, and animation,—and that consequently to abandon oneself to amusement, and to allow it to absorb our whole time and interest, is to turn what should be a means into an end,—a great perversion this of the moral order. Now it has been previously pointed out that the tongue is the instrument of recreation, with which Nature (as the moralist would put it, God it would be in the mouth of the religionist and divine) has provided mankind. By all means concede this function to the tongue, and admit frankly and cordially that the tongue, when fulfilling this function,—when brightening life's monotony by sprightly, cheerful talk, and lightening its burdens by reciprocation of confidences,—is doing well, and answering one of the ends for which it was designed. But even so, temperance must be observed in this use of the tongue. To be perpetually talking, never at work, is the sign of a shallow-brained, empty-headed person, with no force of character ; and one is reminded of the Apostle's censure of certain women, who have no domestic duties to occupy them (what a healthiness of moral tone there is in those Pastoral Epistles of St. Paul !); “ And withal they learn *to be* idle, wandering about from house to house ; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busybodies, speaking things which they ought not.”¹ “ Idle and tattlers also, speaking things which they ought not.” The Greek word translated “ tattlers ” is very expressive. According to its derivation it gives the notion of boiling or bubbling over,²—bub-

¹ 1 Tim. v. 13.

² Φλύαροι. From φλύω or φλέω, to overflow, boil or bubble over, The word does not occur again in the Greek Testament, but the cog-

bling over with some piece of gossip, which the tattler cannot contain himself from discharging upon his neighbours, however much misapprehension it may occasion, or however much mischief it may do. It is chiefly, no doubt, as the Apostle intimates, idle or unoccupied people who may be expected to bubble over with idle words. Chiefly, but not by any means exclusively. The strain, which business or devotion puts for a time upon us, is apt to cause the mind to rebound when it is released, and amid the too profuse indulgence of talk, which follows such a strain, the words often escape which, when in our nightly self-examination we look back upon them, we could earnestly wish to have been unsaid, and which furnish an example of the truth of the wise man's wise saying, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin."

But has reason anything to advance in behalf of occasionally restraining the tongue, not only from light and frivolous, but also from useful and edifying utterances? Has it anything to say in justification of the Psalmist's practice, "I held my tongue, and spake nothing: I kept silence, yea, even from good words; but it was pain and grief to me." (He found great difficulty in forbearing from words, but it appears that his forbearance was blessed to him by a strong rallying of the spiritual life at the heart, which is its centre, much as the pruning of the shoots of the vine causes the sap to rally in its inner resorts, and promotes instead of hinders the fertility of the branches; for he proceeds thus); "My heart was hot

nate verb is found in 3 John 10, where the Authorised and Revised Versions both render it, "*prating* against us."

within me, and while I was thus musing " (not talking, but musing) "the fire kindled" (the fire of inspiration, falling from heaven upon the heart in a moment of quiet meditation): "and at the last I spake with my tongue,"¹ (spake well and effectively, because in truth it was not I that spake, but the Spirit of the heavenly Father who spake in me and by me).² Yes, reason has its account to give of this keeping silence even from good words, and the happy effects of it. By the constitution of our nature we cannot always be giving out, either physically or mentally, without taking in. Our resources both of body and mind are limited. Bodily toil, however useful and productive, exhausts a man; his strength must be renewed by taking food and rest at intervals. The mind observes a similar law. It cannot exert itself in seeking to benefit others by means of the tongue, unless the springs of its own moral and spiritual life are fed by internal self-communing, by prayer and meditation, not merely formal and stated, but pursued at intervals during the day. And, to give room for these intervals, silence must be kept for a space, be the space never so short. No man ever yet succeeded in living the spiritual life without constant ejaculatory prayer, without at all events (if not actual petitions, yet) supplicating mental glances directed all day long to the Divine Master—glances by which we court his eye, ask his guidance, seek his help and blessing, thank him for his mercies. These mental glances are in fact the respirations of the soul of man, the life of which, like bodily life, is carried on by successive

¹ Psalm xxxix. 3, 4. P.B.V.

² See 2 Sam. xxiii. 2, with St. Matt. x. 19, 20.

acts of respiration, that is, by receiving the Spirit of God into the inner man, that we may send Him forth again in efforts to bless and benefit others. The sending forth cannot be sustained without the continual reception. We cannot make spiritual impressions upon others without continually deepening such impressions in ourselves. Even the most edifying conversation will gain in power and real influence for good by such retreats into the hidden chamber of the heart, that we may be there alone with God. The vision of angels at the Nativity,—what they announced to men, and what adoration they presented to God,—was blazed abroad by the shepherds, who were the first human preachers of the Gospel,¹ and was no doubt blessed to the souls of many of the hearers, who kept their eyes on the holy Child from that day forward. One of those who had heard the shepherds' story repeated it to others, and there was much talk and a general circulation of the intelligence.² "But Mary," it is said, "kept all these things, and pondered *them* in her heart."³ She did not talk like the outside world; she mused, tried to evolve the significance of the heavenly vision, the meanings which it might have for herself, for Israel, for the world. She kept silence, even from good words, and deeply pondered the glad tidings; and we can well conceive that while she was thus musing the sacred fire fell upon her heart, and kindled there an adoration of God for his purposes of grace to man, similar to that which the multitude of the heavenly host had rendered, when the anthem of the Nativity had burst from their lips;

¹ See St. Luke ii. 17.² Verse 18.³ Verse 19.

"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men."¹ And thus we are brought to speak of the experience of spiritual persons as confirming, no less than reason, the Scriptural censure of talkativeness and idle words, and the Scriptural precept of bridling the tongue and refraining the lips.

We have been engaged in a lively and very animated conversation, which, partly from the geniality and social qualities of persons in the company, partly from the happy and somewhat rare accident of their having a community of interests and sympathies, has greatly entertained us and drawn us out. Nothing has been said, it may be, which was even questionable in its character, nothing which has even jarred unpleasantly upon that very delicate, sensitive, and highly-strung instrument, the conscience of a real Christian. No word has been dropped of ungenerous disparagement, or of unkind criticism upon a neighbour's character and conduct, or of irreverent jesting upon sacred subjects, or of immodest innuendo, though of how very few animated conversations, even in a company of persons high-principled and right-minded in the main, can this be said! But there has

¹ St. Luke ii. 14. In connexion with the rule of occasional silence, "even from good words," the following beautiful passage from Scupoli's *Spiritual Combat* will be read with pleasure :—

"Be ready to speak of God, and especially of His Love and Goodness, but with guardedness, lest you fall into some error concerning Him; and rather delight to hear others speak of Him, treasuring up their words in your inmost heart.

"Let the sound of men's words strike only upon your ear, and let your heart be lifted up to God; and, if you must listen to what they say in order to know how to reply to them, still forget not to raise your eyes thoughtfully towards Heaven, where God dwells, and contemplate His loftiness, as He deigns to regard your vileness."—Chap. xxiv. "How to Rule the Tongue."

been talking more than enough, and abundance of pointed repartee, and laughter loud and ringing, and much innocent merriment, and it has carried us away for the time,—we have been fully absorbed in it. How does it all look when we review it in making up the spiritual accounts of the day in our nightly self-examination? Well, we are wearied and fatigued, even if we have nothing to accuse ourselves of; it has been a whirl of conversation, and anecdote, and joke; social intercourse has done its utmost for us in the way of amusement, and has left a certain barrenness and emptiness behind. And the secret of this barrenness and emptiness, when we come to analyse our state of mind, is seen to be that there has been no pause in the flow of conversation, it has been one tumult of talking and laughing without a moment's repose. There has been a multitude of words; and if, as far as our own retrospection is concerned, no sin has transpired in them, that has been accidental, we ourselves were not self-possessed, were not "taking heed to our ways," and so might at any moment quite thoughtlessly and indeliberately have "offended with our tongue."

And as regards *good* words, such as are uttered with the design of edifying others, and of which it might at first appear that it would be impossible to say too many, what does the experience of any earnest Christian preacher teach him? Is it not that the exigencies of his position may easily,—do, as a fact, very often,—demand from him much more preaching than is good for him? How does that continually giving out in the way of religious instruction tend to impoverish his mind, and by

doing so to make the instruction itself meagre, thin, wanting in substance and solidity! O for a pause in this ceaseless sermon-making! for one or two Sundays' silence "even from good words." Oh for opportunities to hear other men and profit by their spiritual counsels! Oh for sufficient time daily to read and weigh the Scriptures, and to pursue such studies as help to the knowledge of the same! Is not this the fond wish of the heart of every earnest Christian minister, the necessities of whose work, in demanding from him constant effort in different forms for the spiritual welfare of his people, draw him away from his oratory and his study far more than he feels to be good for himself? And if it be asked how this observation bears upon the *general* duty of Christian people as regards the government of the tongue, let it be borne in mind that, as has been previously pointed out, the precepts, "Let your speech *be* alway with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man,"¹ and "Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good for edifying as the need may be, that it may minister grace unto the hearers,"² are undoubtedly addressed in the first instance, not to the ordained minister, but to the private Christian, and are designed for the regulation of ordinary social intercourse. We are all of us, and not ministers only, solemnly bidden to edify others, unofficially and informally, as occasion may arise and opportunity serve. And in this work of informal and private edification of others we shall do well to remember the lesson, which for Christian ministers is emphasized by their

¹ Col. iv. 6.

² Eph. iv. 29.

vocation itself, that there is "a time to keep silence" as well as "a time to speak,"¹ and that the occasional restraining of the lips even from good words, while the heart muses in quiet meditation, may be the best means of seasoning our speech with salt and imbuing it with grace, of making it effective, and adapting it to the occasion and to the company, so that the hearer shall say of it, "A word *spoken* in due season, how good *is it!*" and the speaker shall acknowledge that in his experience the earlier clause of the proverb is also verified; "A man hath joy by the answer of his mouth."²

¹ Eccles. iii. 7.

² Prov. xv. 23.

CHAPTER VIII

WATCHFULNESS OVER THE SENSES

The serpent said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? . . . 6. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat.—GEN. iii. 1, 6.

THE heart, which the wise man counsels us to “keep with all diligence,” requires to be guarded, as he intimates, not only at the avenue of the tongue, but at the avenue of the senses also. It is by this avenue that the heart is reached. By the tongue we make impressions on the minds of others. Through the senses impressions are made on our own minds. Through the gate of the tongue evil passes out; through the gate of the senses it enters. Our Lord’s precept to watch, therefore, can be only partially fulfilled by watchfulness over the words,—in order to its complete fulfilment there must also be watchfulness over the senses. For suppose the sentinels at the gate of a beleaguered city should only ask the passports of persons passing out, and not also of those who sought admission. This might secure the city against traitors wishing to communicate with the assailants, but would leave it unprotected against

the assailants themselves, one or more of whom might enter into the city without impediment, and being there might throw the gates open to the besieging force. It behoves us to watch then over the impressions which are being continually conveyed to us through the senses. And therefore the wise man, in his precept to keep the heart, mentions the chief of the senses as one avenue which needs guarding ;—“Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee.”¹ It has been remarked in an earlier Chapter that the temptation of our first mother furnishes the norm or model of all succeeding temptations. And, short as the narrative of the first temptation is, we shall find, on looking closely into it, that the evil found admission through the avenue of each of the senses. It reached her in the first instance through *the ear*, the insinuation of the harshness of God's restrictions having been made by the tongue of the devil ; “Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden ?” Then next *the eye* played its part in seconding the temptation, which had been first conveyed through the ear ; for “the woman saw that the tree was pleasant to the eyes” (“that it was a *delight* to the eyes,” is the rendering of the Revised Version). It had attractions also for the lower and coarser senses ;—for the taste ; “the woman saw that it was good for food” ;—for the touch ; for “she took of the fruit thereof,” handled it, felt its smooth, glossy surface ;—and doubtless for the smell also ; for this was a tree of trees, clad, in order to man's probation, with every charm of the vegetable world ; and is not the fragrant odour of

¹ Prov. iv. 25.

trees, of the stems of some of them, of the blossoms and fruit of others, one of the chief of these charms? We are not told what tree it was,—possibly none of any existing species,—but let us imagine the stem of the pine, the fruit of the citron, and the blossoms of the rose combined; and the imaginary picture may help us to conceive a tree invested, as Holy Scripture leads us to believe this one was, with every possible attraction to the senses.

But, though the remark lies a little out of the direct path of the argument, I cannot help noticing, as I cast my eyes over this narrative of the first temptation, that it was not through the senses only, or mainly, that our first mother was assailed, but through the mind. The great lure was curiosity, the desire of possessing a knowledge which Almighty God had not thought fit to communicate to man. The devil threw out to her the bait of a godlike wisdom, if she would but eat of the fruit (“Then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”¹), and she greedily took the bait; she “saw that it was a tree to be desired to make *one* wise,” and this finally determined her to take the fruit thereof and to eat. The circumstance is very observable as exhibiting the true philosophy of temptation. It is the heart,—or, in other words, the rational soul,—which is assaulted through the senses; in the absence of the rational soul there could be no temptation or moral probation. Capacity for receiving a revelation, whether from God’s works or his word, the perception of right and wrong, and the power of moral choice,—all this is involved in a

¹ Gen. iii. 5.

rational soul. Animals, though they have all the senses, and in some cases much keener senses than man, have not this moral faculty, and therefore cannot be subjected, as men are, to temptation. But men have it, and it is to this faculty in them that temptation is addressed. Eve had it. She had received a direct revelation from the Author of her being, indicating the path of duty and the penalty annexed to turning aside out of the path. But she did not keep her heart with all diligence by watchfulness over the various avenues at which access might be had to it. She did not reject with holy horror the doubt of her Creator's goodness which the devil injected into her mind. She allowed herself to consider the insinuation, and to make some sort of reply to it, thus reasoning where she ought to have resolutely closed her ear,—the sure prelude this of ultimately yielding. Then the tempter's lie as to the godlike knowledge which should be gained by disobedience, being seconded by the apparent attractiveness of the fruit to the eye and to the other senses, became irresistible. Had she closed her ear to the first suggestion of evil, and her eye to the fascinations of the tree, she would have kept her conscience undefiled, her will firm, her mind and heart true to her Maker ;—as it was, she fell,—“being deceived she was in the transgression.”¹

1. In applying the narrative to our own circumstances, we will consider first the temptations which get access to the heart through the ear, temptations which reach most men at a very early period of life.

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 14.

That is a weighty word which St. Paul quotes from Menander,—a word which shows how much of moral truth God made known to the higher spirits among the heathen by the revelations of Nature and the moral sense,—“Evil communications corrupt good manners.”¹ The Greek word translated communications gives rather the idea of conversation,—social communing between friends in the intercourse of daily life.² It is a painful circumstance connected with education, that as soon as ever a young boy leaves the shelter of home, and enters upon school life, the evil communications begin to be made to him which corrupt good manners, and he is too often initiated into sin by the licentious and immoral talk which, when left alone with his schoolfellows, he hears all around him. How do his looks bear witness to the moral contamination which he has received at school! He left home bright-looking and innocent, the clearness of his conscience reflecting itself in his features; he returns to it at the end of his first half year comparatively downcast and dogged, with the uneasy feeling of having learned something which he must reserve from those, to whom before his heart was always open, even when he had committed a fault,—father, mother, and sisters. Much might be

¹ 1 Cor. xv. 33. *Φθείρουσιν ἡθὴ χρηστὰ ὁμιλίας κακὰ.* From the *Thais* of Menander.

² The cognate verb is used of the communing of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus (St. Luke xxiv. 15); of the talk which St. Paul had with the members of his congregation at Troas after the resurrection of Eutychus (Acts xx. 11)—a talk which would naturally assume the form, not of a methodical address, such as his previous sermon had been, but of an interchange of remarks, affectionate farewells, and so forth; and, lastly, of the conversations which Felix used to have with St. Paul, in the vain hope that the Apostle would offer a bribe for his release (Acts xxiv. 26).

done, no doubt,—nay, it is not too much to say that by improved discipline and those new methods, which the much higher tone of education at the present day has led us to adopt in our schools, very much has been done,—to correct this really frightful mischief ; but unless a constant surveillance over every unoccupied minute of a boy's life were to be exercised,—such a surveillance as, even if it could be contrived, would destroy independence of character and would shelter from temptation instead of giving the victory over it,—the entire suppression of all bad conversation in our schools would be impracticable,—at some unguarded corner of time the evil would be insinuated through the ear. And the only real remedy for boys under such circumstances, as also for men (who, however, chiefly from their being more under restraint from the conventional usages of ordinary good society, are apt to be less palpably gross and immodest)—the only remedy is to turn away the ear resolutely, and, where the attempt to discountenance such conversation fails, to quit the company. How many a heartache in future life would have been saved, how would “the chambers of imagery” have been kept pure from foul daubs and smirches, had the heart been thus kept in early life at the avenue of the ear !

Of the duty of turning our ears away from slanderous and defamatory gossip, as it has already been touched upon in a previous Chapter, nothing more need here be said, than to point out and make clear the grounds on which it rests. There is in the Book of Leviticus a distinct prohibition to this effect,—and surely it must, from the very terms of it, be one of those moral prohibitions, from the ob-

servance of which no Christian man is exempt ; "Thou shalt not go up and down *as* a talebearer among thy people."¹ And as if to illustrate from human experience the wisdom and necessity of the prohibition, it is said in the Book of Proverbs ; "Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out : so where *there is* no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."² The talebearer is ever laying the fuel for misunderstandings, dislikes, alienations of friends, jealousies, grudges, evil surmisings ; and accordingly talebearing is forbidden, as tending to those breaches of charity, whereby those who should love as brethren are kept asunder. And the same precept forbids by implication the listening to or receiving a tale to another's disadvantage. For, as the salesman who can find no market for his goods soon ceases to pursue his trade, so a talebearer, who finds no one to receive and believe his tittle-tattle, soon discontinues it ;—it is the credulous ear, the ear that welcomes the tidings of a neighbour's faults and failures, which alone keeps slanderous gossip alive. Without an audience, there would be no slander or detraction. And as an injury to *society* is avoided by turning a deaf ear to the talebearer, so no less surely an injury to *oneself*. For "envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness" have their roots quick in the hearts of all of us, as is shown by the fact that the Church bids us pray in the Litany to be delivered from these sins, and the listening to the talebearer tends to draw out these sentiments and confirm them, and thus does us a spiritual mischief. Therefore when the talebearer comes open-mouthed to thee with something to thy neighbour's

¹ Lev. xix. 16.

² Prov. xxvi. 20.

discredit, give him no encouragement to proceed, except indeed it be the duty of thy position to hear, examine, and censure ; make it clear that this topic has no attractions for thee, and endeavour adroitly to turn the conversation into another channel.

But let us not fail to observe, since the observation shows the importance of these avenues to the mind, and the consequent need of guarding them diligently, that the antidote as well as the poison may enter through them. Are we not expressly told that it is through the avenue of the ear that saving truth reaches us? Yes ; it is through this organ that the tale of God's love, and of the redemption which in that love He has provided, gains access to the heart ; for "*faith cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God."¹

2. We come next to speak of those temptations which get access to the mind through the eye—"the woman saw that the tree was a delight to the eyes." The saints and servants of God under all dispensations have shown themselves fully alive to the great moral mischiefs which may be insinuated through the eye. As to temptations of a gross and coarse kind, the Wise Man teaches that these often find an entrance through the eye, warning us as he does against the sparkling and glistening of the ruby fluid in the wine-cup ; "Look not thou upon the wine when it is red, when it giveth his colour in the cup, *when* it moveth itself aright. At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder."² But the spiritually-minded Psalmist knew well that there are subtle and refined temptations which insinuate them-

¹ Rom. x. 17.

² Prov. xxiii. 31, 32.

selves through the eye. "Turn away mine eyes," cries he, "from beholding vanity ; *and* quicken thou me in thy way,"¹ intimating that the occupation of the eyes with vanity or vain show would be a snare, embarrassment, hindrance in running the way of God's commandments. Vanity means emptiness, show without substance ; and if we desire to know what especially the Psalmist denotes by this word, a passage in the Proverbs may furnish us with the answer ; "Wilt thou set thine eyes upon that which is not ?" (which is essentially fugitive and temporary in its character) "for *riches* certainly make themselves wings ; they fly away as an eagle toward heaven."² Yes, it is riches,—meaning by that term not the gold and silver, which only the miser, a comparatively rare character, cares for, but the comforts, luxuries, refinements, splendour, position, secular power, which money commands and represents,—this is probably the vanity which the Psalmist prays that his eyes may be turned away from beholding, because there is something in it so alluring to the natural heart. And if we turn to the New Testament, we find St. John enumerating "the lust of the eyes" as one of the three great classes of human temptations ; "For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the vain-glory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."³ And that Satan, from his long experience of human nature, and observation of the temptations which are most influential with the mass of men, quite appreciates the eye as an avenue by which evil may be instilled

¹ Psalm cxix. 37.

² Prov. xxiii. 5.

³ 1 John ii. 16, R. V.

into the heart, is clear from the assault which in this quarter he made upon our Blessed Lord, taking Him up into an exceeding high mountain, and showing Him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them, and offering to give Him all as the price of an act of idolatry.¹

Oh what a subtle and dangerous sin is covetousness,—all the more dangerous because it does not shock us, as grosser sins do! It is simply the desire, not necessarily of large means or lofty position—covetousness is not *necessarily* allied with ambition, though in all ambition there is an element of covetousness—but of surrounding oneself with such worldly advantages and comforts as might make earth a comfortable home, wherein the soul might be quite content to dwell for ever, without aspiring after, without demanding as a necessity, any better home. The covetous man would be well content to live on earth for ever, if only he could be exempt from the ordinary troubles and cares incidental to human life,—from sickness, from reverses of fortune, from bereavement, from the infirmities of old age. Paradise, heaven, “the bright shore of love” which lies beyond the grave, these are to him the baseless shadow of a dream; he does not, indeed, at all deny or question their existence; but they have no reality for him; he cannot grasp them;—the hope of them, the longing for them, is not a moral force which has found place in his nature.

Oh, have not even the best of us felt the workings of this most subtle sin in our hearts? And when have we most felt it? What has aroused and stirred

¹ See St. Matt. iv. 8, 9.

it into conscious life within us, much as a viper found in a hedgerow, stiff and rigid with the frost, begins to stir and twist itself, when you bring it near the fire of the hearth? It is when we have gazed upon large and commodious mansions, furnished with every comfort and luxury which wealth can purchase, and adorned with the choicest productions of art; upon lawns, and parks, and gardens, and wooded slopes, which make the immediate surroundings of the house an earthly paradise; and when the reflexion rises up in the mind that all this belongs to its fortunate possessor without toil, or anxiety, without the sweat of the brow or the labour of the hands, that he inherited from his ancestors what the hard-won earnings of a lifetime would never suffice to buy. Under such circumstances, has the desire never sprung up in your heart, and uttered itself more or less articulately, "Oh that his lot were mine! Oh that I might only share so much of his good fortune as might release me from the necessity of working to support myself and those dependent on me, and might put me in perfectly easy circumstances for the rest of my days!" "And is that movement of desire wrong?" you may possibly ask. Well; "to the law and to the testimony;"¹ we will judge it by the word of God. "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, nor" (specifying several details, as if there were, for whatever reasons, a special emphasis to be laid on this particular precept) "any thing that is thy neighbour's."² And since what we see in our own experience to produce evil and mischievous results naturally tends to make us averse to it, it

¹ See Isaiah viii. 20.

² Exod. xx. 17; Deut. v. 21.

may add seriousness and weight to the prohibition of the Tenth Commandment to observe that with such desires as we have just depicted Socialism begins,—that monstrous and impious assault upon the existing order of things, which tends towards universal leveling and the disintegration of society,—which aims at repealing the Fifth Commandment, but is set on in the first instance by the violation of the Tenth. Alas! what rapid strides is this deadly heresy making in all countries, and not least in our own!

And what is the means of suppressing the covetous desire? Withstand it in its beginnings. Resist it where it enters, at the eye. "Look not thou upon the wine, when it is red." "O turn away mine eyes from beholding vanity." "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee." What is it to look right on and straight before us? To look right on is to see what we cannot help seeing, because it is placed full in front of us. And what is it that confronts us, when we have risen in the morning, and are ready to begin the day? Our work, whatever it is; that which God in the order of his Providence has given us to do. Look not in those quarters, where to look is to lust for what is not thine. Look to your work. Let this be your watchword on such occasions—an old-fashioned, but a safe and sound one; "Not to covet nor desire other men's goods; but to learn and labour truly" (to learn, while a child; to labour, when one has learned) "to get mine own living, and to do my duty in that state of life, unto which it shall please God to call me!"¹

The development of human resources, which is

¹ *Church Catechism*—"My duty towards my Neighbour."

called Civilisation, necessarily enlarges the range of our temptations, while at the same time, of course, it enlarges correspondingly the means of resisting them. Consider only how accessible the power of reading, and the facilities of reading which the publication of cheap books gives to all classes,—how accessible, I say, these resources of Civilisation make us to the temptations which enter through the eye. Sceptical thoughts, rationalistic and latitudinarian thoughts verging in the direction of scepticism, nay, pushing upwards to become full-blown scepticism, as the bud to become the blossom, impure thoughts of which upright men would gladly rid their minds for ever, but it is too late now,—the ideas have left an indelible stain,—how often and often have such thoughts been instilled by books or journals glanced over in an unguarded moment, in one of those spare corners of time which might have been turned to good account! And where no such positive mischief has been done, how apt are we to spend too much time (some time, of course, it is necessary to spend, if we desire to keep in touch with currents of modern thought and feeling) upon the mere news of the day, a practice which, when carried to excess, cannot fail to dissipate and enervate the mind! Surely in days when the press is so active, and inundates the world with such a deluge of literature, flimsy as well as solid, too great caution cannot be exercised, if the heart is to be kept pure from all defilements of unbelief and lust, and braced up to the Master's service! Let not thine eye wander in the direction of sensational and unwholesome reading, lest thou do thyself inadvertently a moral mischief.

But here again, as in the case of the ear, let us not fail to observe that the antidote, as well as the poison, may enter through this avenue. What grand, edifying, elevating thoughts may come to us by contemplating God's works in Nature, those works which we have only to open our eyes to see,¹ and perhaps still more those which the telescope and the microscope and other contrivances of science discover to us! Indeed it may be very much questioned whether the old-fashioned spiritual books, admirable as many of them are, lay sufficient stress upon the simple contemplation of external Nature—the revelation which God has made of Himself in his works—as the means of growing both in knowledge and grace.—And as regards reading, and the facilities of reading, it needs not to add, because it is so obvious, that a literally inexhaustible mine of wisdom, guidance, and consolation is stored up for us in Holy Scripture, and that, while the Holy Spirit must still remain the great Teacher in the matter of Divine Truth, which without his agency is incommunicable by man to man, it is no small advantage incidental to our times to have so many works accessible to us, which illustrate and explain the Scripture, and still more so many spiritual and devotional books, which reflect Scriptural truth from the various angles of incidence, at which

¹ "He told me that GOD had done him a singular favour, in his conversion at the age of eighteen. That in the winter, seeing a tree stripped of its leaves, and considering that within a little time, the leaves would be renewed, and after that the flowers and fruit appear, he received a high view of the Providence and Power of GOD, which has never since been effaced from his soul. That this view had perfectly set him loose from the world, and kindled in him such a love for GOD, that he could not tell whether it had increased in above forty years that he had lived since."—*Letters and Conversations of Brother Lawrence*—"First Conversation." (Masters & Co., 1887.)

it strikes on the minds of uninspired but spiritual men.

As to the other and lower senses, the smell, the taste, the touch (which last is the lowest of them all, as being the most material, and giving us a stronger assurance of the reality and existence of matter than any of the others), no more need be said by way of showing the necessity of watchfulness over them, than that the soul is all day long receiving impressions through them, and that some of these impressions, corresponding to the corrupt tendencies which it finds there, instigate to gluttony, luxury, indolence, undue softness,—temptations which Christ's faithful soldier must never succumb to. "Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."¹ "The ark, and Israel, and Judah, abide in tents" (said a gallant soldier of old, and his words faithfully express the true soldier spirit); "and my lord Joab, and the servants of my lord, are encamped in the open fields; shall I then go into mine house, to eat and to drink? *as* thou livest, and *as* thy soul liveth, I will not do this thing."²

Oh God, who hast given thine only Son to be unto us a sacrifice for sin,³ give us also grace to present our bodies a living sacrifice,⁴ and to yield our members and our senses as instruments of righteousness unto thee!⁵

Make us swift to hear thy word,⁶ and so to hear it that we may believe:⁷ make us deaf to the voice of flattery and of sinful enticement.⁸

¹ 2 Tim. ii. 3.

³ See Collect for Second Sunday after Easter.

⁵ See Rom. vi. 13.

⁷ See Rom. x. 17.

² 2 Sam. xi. 11.

⁴ See Rom. xii. 1.

⁶ See James i. 19.

⁸ See Acts xii. 22, 23; Gen. iii. 6.

Give us grace to mortify the lust of the eyes,¹ to seek out of the book of the Lord and read,² and to seek out and have pleasure in thy works also.³

Let us not lust after the flesh pots⁴ of carnal and sensual indulgences, but rather after that heavenly manna of spiritual joy and peace, the taste whereof is like wafers made with honey.⁵

Let us not be decoyed by the pleasures of sin, as Isaac by the smell of Esau's raiment,⁶ but rather choose to suffer affliction with thy people,⁷ and to take up the cross daily,⁸ after the pattern of Him who gave Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to Thee for a sweetsmelling savour.⁹

And grant us to sanctify the sense of touch also, "working with our hands the thing which is good, that we may have to give to him that needeth."¹⁰

¹ See 1 John ii. 16.

² Psalm cxi. 2.

³ See Exod. xvi. 31.

⁴ See Heb. xi. 25.

⁵ See Eph. v. 2.

⁶ See Isaiah xxxiv. 16.

⁷ See Exod. xvi. 3; Num. xvi. 4, 5.

⁸ See Gen. xxvii. 27.

⁹ See St. Luke ix. 23.

¹⁰ See Eph. iv. 28.

CHAPTER IX

WATCHFULNESS OVER THE HEART AT THE AVENUE OF MORAL ACTION

~~Whether~~ whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to
the glory of God.—I COR. x. 31.

WE have considered the keeping of the heart at the two first avenues mentioned by the wise man, the avenue of the tongue, and the avenue of the senses. We now come to the third avenue, that of moral action, the guarding of which is enjoined in these words, "Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established."¹ The tongue, which has been considered at great length, seems to be the most important of the three avenues, because the greatest amount of traffic with the outward world is carried on through it. Evil both gets access to us, and also passes out of us, through the tongue. Through the *senses* it only gets access to us. Through *moral action* it only passes out of us.

We shall now speak of moral action, first, *in the graver passages of life*, and then *in its small and trivial details*.

I. And, first, *in its graver passages*. We are all of us apt more or less,—some more than others,

¹ Prov. iv. 26.

from natural impetuosity of disposition, but all of us in a measure,—to act from impulse, and as our feelings on the spur of the moment seem to prompt,—the very reverse this of the precept given by the wise man for the regulation of our actions; “Ponder” (it might be translated, “Weigh carefully”) “the path of thy feet.” Among the many occasions when men act hastily, without thought and self-collectedness, two are especially to be noticed, first, when they are angry, and, secondly, when they are warmly interested in some particular study or pursuit.

1. A fit of temper or pique is apt to carry a man away to do that, which not only in his calmer moments will he seriously disapprove, but which is fraught with mischievous results to himself. Holy Scripture contains very serious and solemn warnings as to the evil which may accrue from the mere indulgence of temper, whether by good or by bad men. The one is made to smart for it for the remainder of his life; to the other it is the beginning of his ruin.

The first case in point is that of Moses. Towards the close of the forty years’ wandering in the wilderness, the repeated perverseness and provocations of the people seem to have wearied out his patience, though we are told he “*was* very meek, above all the men which *were* upon the face of the earth.”¹ Once again, as they had done before, the people repined for want of water, and there was an outbreak of upbraiding against him and his brother for having cruelly disappointed all the hopes held out to them, when breaking loose from the bondage

¹ Num. xii. 3.

of Egypt. It is very observable how, in the directions given on that occasion to Moses, not a trace of impatience in the *Divine* mind transpires,—reminding one of the beautiful saying of Bishop Andrewes in one of his prayers, “Thy compassion, O Lord, exceedeth ours, as much as Thou exceedest us.”¹ Moses is merely directed to take the wonder-working rod, and to relieve the distress of the people by speaking to the rock, which, on being spoken to, should give forth its water.² Moses, however, has been put into such a state of irritability by the objurgation of the people, that he allows himself to throw off the character of God’s agent, and to assume an independent position; and, having done this, he deviates from the orders given him, as if he knew better than God how the water was to be elicited. “Hear now, ye rebels,” said he; “must we fetch you water out of this rock? And Moses lifted up his hand” (having been bidden only to lift up his voice), “and with his rod he smote the rock twice” (the second stroke showing the vehemence of his spirit, and the impulse of temper under which he is acting; but his want of self-control, while it shall be visited on himself, shall not defeat the purpose of God’s compassion for his suffering people): “the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank.”³ In losing his temper, Moses lost also at the same time the fondest wish of his heart. The sentence immediately fell from heaven, which excluded him and his brother from the promised land.⁴

¹ “Quia tua nostram superat misericordia quantum tu nos.”—Confessio Peccati.

² Num xx. 7, 8.

³ Verses 10, 11.

⁴ Verse 12.

The other case is that of Judas Iscariot the traitor. St. John, in narrating his act of treachery, expressly tells us that he was instigated to it by a sudden assault of the devil, who little by little, through small acts of dishonesty and unfaithfulness to his trust, had gained a mastery over his will which deprived him of all self-control. But it is clear from the narrative that the natural motive, which the devil stimulated into activity, was that of pique and wounded pride. St. John, at St. Peter's suggestion, had asked our Lord which of the twelve it was that should perform the predicted treachery. Hereon our Lord expressly indicated Judas ; "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped *it*. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave *it* to Judas Iscariot, *the son* of Simon."¹ The exposure to his fellow-disciples of the black purpose simmering in his heart gave the final impulse to his will, which had been hitherto balancing and undetermined. Our Lord had pointed him out to his colleagues as a false-hearted disciple, as a wolf clad in sheep's clothing, which had found its way into the little flock of true sheep. This suppressed all the kindlier feelings towards his Master which had once found place in his heart ;—"cost what it may," thought he to himself, "I will now betray Him, and so requite Him for the disgrace which He has done me." To his own consciousness, probably, there was nothing more than a process of natural feeling ; pique, irritation, wounded vanity, revenge,—this was the machinery of the moral action. But it is expressly revealed to us for our warning as

¹ See St. John xiii. 24, 25, 26.

to the possible origin and nature of violent fits of temper—particularly where there has been a long previous course of unfaithfulness to conscience—that the springs of the machinery were worked by the powers of darkness; “After the sop Satan entered into him.”¹

Now as to the method, under God’s grace, of resisting and conquering outbreaks of temper, I know of no method so likely to be effectual as that of regarding every small trial of patience, every trivial thwarting of our own will, as one of the crosses which, for the discipline of our character, our Divine Master lays upon those who are minded, at whatever cost, to follow Him, according to that gracious word of his; “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself” (turn his back upon himself, and refuse to recognise his own will as a guide), “and take up his cross daily, and follow me.”² Kiss the cross; embrace it; say to the Master in your heart that, as it is his badge and seal proclaiming you to be his, you would not be without it. But you say, “It is such a very slight cross,—this thwarting of my own will,—as to be almost no cross at all, as to offer no credit at all by bearing it patiently and lovingly;—I shall have kept my temper—is that all?” But if thou canst not bear a small cross, how couldst thou hope to bear suitably the great burdens of life, bereavement, poverty, long-continued and wearing sickness? By small trials the Lord seeks to discipline the soul for severer ones. And is not the cross of his choosing and sending, be it small or great, always much better than what we should

¹ St. John xiii. 27.

² St. Luke ix. 23.

choose for ourselves, much more adapted to our own strength, temperament, capabilities, than any other which could be devised? We are his bond-servants under the yoke ;¹ and if we will but take the yoke upon us, not declining it in the pride of our hearts, because it is a yoke which we can get no credit from bearing, but embracing it as his sending, we shall assuredly know it by our own experience to be easy and light, and shall find rest in the bearing of it.²

2. But we require to "ponder the path of our feet" when brought under *any* strong natural impulse, however in itself innocent, or even praiseworthy. And this is a caution which addresses itself more especially to persons of intelligence and cultivation. Such persons have strong interests in certain pursuits,—in politics, or in literature, or in art, or in the study of Nature. Nay, it may be that what they do in the work of their ordinary everyday calling is done with a zest ; for the mind creates its own interests, and every business into which we throw ourselves with a resolve to master it, however dry in itself, becomes a source of pleasure to an intelligent person. Now if we are minded to live, not unto ourselves, but unto the Lord, we must not allow ourselves to pursue any occupation merely from the natural interest which it has for our minds ; to do so would be to live, not unto the Lord, but unto ourselves. We shall never plunge into interesting work with thoughtless impetuosity, actuated merely by the attractions which it has for us ; we shall pause for a few moments, before we commence, to set our motive right, and to consecrate the pursuit,

¹ See 1 Tim. vi. 1. R.V.

² See St. Matt. xi. 29, 30.

whatever it be, by a word of mental prayer—prayer that God would take it up into the great scheme of his service, would bless it, and bless us in the doing of it, and make it conduce to those ends, which as Christians we are bound to seek supremely (regarding all other ends as subordinate), our Divine Master's glory, and the fulfilment of the task which, in the order of his good and wise Providence, He has allotted to us. The nature of this task may be taken to be more or less indicated by our qualifications for certain pursuits above others, and by our tastes, which usually follow our qualifications; if a man feels that he has a special gift, he almost invariably takes pleasure in the cultivation and exercise of his gift. The pleasure cannot but accrue, when the gift is exercised; but the great point is to be careful that the pleasure does not absorb the mind, to the exclusion, or at least the obscuration, of the higher end,—that the higher end is placed full in our view, and that the action is referred to it every now and then in the intention of the doer. For indeed a man *lives* in his interests; his interests are his true life. How then can he be said to “live unto the Lord,” if his favourite pursuits are embarked in simply for his own gratification,—if the aim to further Christ's service by means of them be not uppermost in his mind? And in order to this, it will be necessary for him, not only to begin a pursuit well, but to check himself in it ever and anon, and inquire into his intention, and set it right with a word of mental prayer, if it be not pointing steadily to the true end. This constant challenging of our motive, even in good and praiseworthy actions, is an

important part of that "pondering the path of our feet," to which the wise man exhorts. And he that is bent on pondering his path in this manner may turn to some account George Herbert's prayer in that well-known lyric of his,—*"The Elixir :"*

"Teach me, my God and King,
In all things Thee to see,
And what I do in anything,
To do it as to Thee.

Not rudely, as a beast,
To run into an action ;
But still to make Thee prepossess,
And give it his perfection."

"His," it may be observed, is for "its,"—the perfection of the action. Every action is imperfect, which has not the furtherance of God's service and Christ's kingdom for its end and aim.

II. And now to come to the point to which the remaining stanzas of this beautiful gem of Christian Poetry lead us on. It must be understood that the Lord, though his yoke is indeed easy,—nay, and pleasant,—and his burden light—nay, elevating rather than distressing—is in a certain sense an exacting Master,—One who demands a man's whole heart, whole life, whole energy, whole interests. He will be served in trifles, in the routine of everyday life, in its drudgeries and manual labours, as well as in its more important and critical passages. He will be served even in actions bound upon us by our own necessities, or by the necessities of the social system, in which we have a part to play.

First, *in actions bound upon us by our own necessities.* This is the lesson taught,—a very far-reaching,

widely-extending lesson,—by the passage at the head of this Chapter ; “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.” The Apostle has been giving directions for the conduct of the Corinthian Christians as to meats which had been offered in sacrifice to idols. In themselves such meats had not contracted any defilement by such a dedication of them (an idol being “nothing in the world”¹); but weak brethren might be scandalized, and a moral mischief done them, by more enlightened disciples allowing themselves to partake of such meats. The rule, therefore, imposed by the Apostle was, to ask no question at the table of a heathen entertainer, but to partake of whatever food might be offered.² In case, however, another Christian should whisper to them to be on their guard against a particular viand, as having been offered to idols, they were forbidden to eat, in deference to the conscientious scruples of the weaker brother who had cautioned them.³ These are the particular circumstances which the Apostle had in his mind, when he gave the general precept now under consideration. But the precept, as is so often the case with the precepts of Scripture, rises high above its surroundings, and is felt by us to embody and enunciate a principle of eternal import and far-reaching application. Eating and drinking are actions which *must* be done, in order to the continuance of our existence. They are the commonest, the most necessary, the most often repeated, of all our actions ; and thus it might perhaps be thought that, since we

¹ 1 Cor. viii. 4.³ Verses 28, 29.² 1 Cor. x. 27.

are not free to leave them undone, there can be no room for serving God in them. But this text, as well as the reason of the thing, shows that it is clearly otherwise. There is evidently scope even here for a higher and a lower motive. In order to secure that these actions shall be done, God has annexed to the doing of them the gratification of a strong natural appetite. And this may easily be the only motive for doing them, the satisfaction of hunger and thirst—the same motive which instigates the lower animals to the same actions. But the Gospel has taught us to regard the body and its members as instruments of God's service; "Yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members *as* instruments of righteousness unto God."¹ And looking at the matter in this light, it is evidently quite possible to take such food as may be necessary for health and strength, with the purpose (by which none of the lower animals can possibly be actuated) of making the body a more efficient instrument of God's service than it otherwise could be. He who is actuated by this purpose in taking nourishment, eats and drinks to the glory of God. And it is noteworthy that the great principle of duty, which the Apostle here inculcated, has rooted itself among Christians in the practice of saying grace,—which practice, however often it is allowed to lapse into a formality, however little hold it takes of the mind of those who adopt it, yet survives as a witness that a precept has been issued to the Church, as part and parcel of Gospel morality, to sanctify the taking of daily food by im-

¹ Rom. vi. 13.

porting into it a high and spiritual motive ; "Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God." I should not leave this part of the subject without pointing out (though there is no time to dwell upon it) that eating and drinking are a form of recreation. Food recruits our physical powers, as amusement recruits the mind. And therefore in the precept to eat and drink to the glory of God it is implied that even necessary amusement may be taken in such a spirit, and with such an aim, that God may be served by the taking of it.

But, secondly, *God may and must be served in actions bound upon us by the necessities of the social system in which we have a part to play.* In order thus to serve Him, it is necessary not only to understand clearly, but thoroughly to imbibe (in such a manner that it becomes an elementary moral conviction, which we carry about everywhere with us, and act upon instinctively), the doctrine that God has a vast field of service, offering positions of the most various kinds, some very high, some very low in the social scale, and all having duties and responsibilities annexed to them, and that men find themselves in one or other of these positions by the special orderings of his Providence. "*The Son of Man*," said the Lord, "*is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants*" (to his Apostles, that is, for the guidance and government of his Church), "*and to every man*,"—by no means to the Apostles only—"his work,"¹—coinciding exactly with the teaching of the second Good Friday Collect, "Almighty and

¹ St. Mark xiii. 34.

everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church" (not the ministry only, but "the whole body," in its least and lowest member, as well as in its highest) "is governed and sanctified; Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates" (degrees and conditions) "of men in thy holy Church, that every member of the same in his vocation and ministry" (observe that *every* vocation or calling, and not merely the vocation and calling of the clergy, is a ministry to God) "may truly and godly serve thee" ("truly and godly," intending in all they do the furtherance of God's service, and the fulfilment of the task assigned by Him in the order of his Providence to that particular person). Holy Scripture, by way of giving the strongest possible emphasis to the doctrine that the duties of every lawful position are a ministry to the Lord, takes as an instance the duties of a slave in a heathen family,—duties which stand at the lowest point of the social scale, which have no sort of dignity, but which, nevertheless, in order that the social machine may work on, some one must do. "Servants, obey in all things *your* masters according to the flesh; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but in singleness of heart, fearing God: and whatsoever ye do, do *it* heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Christ,"¹—ye are really doing service to Him, because Divine Providence has appointed your position and the tasks incidental to it, and He, the risen God-man, at present administers for God in the

¹ Col. iii. 22, 23, 24.

realm of Providence as well as in that of Nature. So that the servant-maid, who, when asked whether she did not find part of her allotted duties to be irksome and a drudgery, replied "Yes ; but when I feel this, I fancy I hear the Divine Master saying, 'Mary, do this *for me* ;' and hearing this, I turn to my task with a will," was not, in so saying, expressing a piece of high-flown and morbid sentiment, but was realising exactly the truth of her position,—she discerned in her calling a ministry to God, and had learned the way of "truly and godly" serving Him in that ministry. And Herbert was probably thinking of a case like hers when, in the latter part of that beautiful lyric of his, he sings thus :—

"All may of Thee partake,
Nothing can be so mean,
But with this tincture 'For thy sake'
Will not grow bright and clean.

A servant with this clause
Makes drudgery divine :
Who sweeps a room, as for Thy laws,
Makes that and the action fine."

But the principle laid down by the Apostle, in connexion with the work of a servant, extends to every piece of mere routine-work incidental to higher positions. Many times every day all of us have works of mere routine to do, which are in themselves absolutely without interest or dignity, and which yet could not be neglected without some amount of inconvenience, or even derangement of part of the social system. I have a letter to write, which seems to be of no consequence whatever, except that

courtesy requires it to be written, and that by the want of courtesy the person, to whom it is to be addressed, might be hurt. Well; the Divine Master's Providence prescribes small and dull duties as well as great and interesting ones, has room in its great scheme for hundreds of little actions,—“the trivial round, the common task;” and in writing my few lines of acknowledgment or congratulation, if I do it as to Him with conscious fidelity, I am really and truly “serving the Lord Christ.” “None of us liveth to himself.” . . . “for whether we live, we live unto the Lord,”¹—that is the ruling aim and motive of the true, as distinct from the nominal, Christian's life. And this motive, imported into even the most common-place action, consecrates the thing done, and, utterly trifling as it may be in itself, gives it a dignity and a moral value. To use once more the poet's striking words,

“This is the wondrous stone
That turneth all to gold:
For that which God doth touch and own
Cannot for less be told.”

And let me add that the doing of even routine actions thus, though of course it tasks the mind to a certain extent, and demands continual re-collection and concentration of the thoughts, yet, paradoxical as the assertion may seem, does not weary or fatigue, as the doing of a number of things mechanically invariably does. No doubt it is necessary, in order thus to do what lies before us, to “ponder the path of our feet;” and this may seem, as viewed theoretically by an observer from without, to be a heavy

¹ See Rom. xiv. 7, 8.

and even intolerable yoke, but it is the yoke of the Divine Master's service ; and he who makes the experiment, in sincerity and heart's uprightness, of taking it upon him, will assuredly be made to know the truth of that Master's words, that his "yoke is easy and his burden light," and will find, in stooping to it, not in declining it, "rest unto his soul."¹

¹ See St. Matt. xi. 29, 30.

CHAPTER X

ON THE PRAYER WHICH WE MUST COMBINE WITH WATCHFULNESS

All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. . . . Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.—DANIEL vi. 7, 9, 10.

It will be remembered that we are now engaged in expanding the counsel which our Blessed Lord gave to his disciples for the conduct of the spiritual life amidst temptations,—a counsel which, since it flowed from his own experience of sorest temptation in the garden of Gethsemane, may be said to come to us tinged and dyed in the Bloody Sweat of the Agony; “Watch and pray.”

In considering the vigilance to which the Lord here exhorts us, we have followed the lines laid down in that great passage of the Book of Proverbs,

where the wise man thus instructs his son ; "Keep thy heart with all diligence" [above all keeping]; "for out of it *are* the issues of life." Each of the three avenues by which, as that passage goes on to teach, the heart is to be kept,—the avenue of the tongue, the avenue of the senses, and the avenue of moral action,—have been fully considered. And we now come to that which is really the weightiest of these two pregnant words of the Divine Master—"Pray," "Watch and pray." I say that "Pray" is the weightiest of the two ingredients in this counsel, although the word "Watch" stands first, as that which was suggested by the sleep of the disciples, and thus took its origin from the circumstances in which our Lord then found Himself. But the utmost vigilance of man, apart from God's guardianship, must fail to secure the tempted soul in the hour of temptation. And accordingly it must be thrown upon Him, "who is able to keep us from falling,"¹ if it is to be secured. And how thrown upon Him but by the prayer of faith,—I do not now mean stated prayer, offered at set times and on the knees (highly important as that is), but that glance of the burdened and believing heart to God under the immediate pressure of trial, which is transacted by a momentary ejaculation, or something less than an ejaculation, a mere exposure of the want to his all-seeing eye, in the assurance that He will understand and supply it? That those who watch must mingle prayer with their watchfulness, if it is to avail for their security, is a lesson as old as Solomon, who in the hundred and twenty-seventh Psalm, which is ascribed to him in the title of it

¹ See Jude 24.

thus sings ; "Except the LORD keep the city, the watchman waketh *but* in vain." In these words there is a deviation from the parallelism of the previous clause, which is of itself instructive. The Psalm had opened thus : "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it." And one might have expected in the corresponding clause, "Except the LORD wake, the watchman waketh but in vain." But to speak of God's waking, as a condition of successful vigilance, would be to imply that He might sleep ; whereas in a preceding Psalm we read, "Behold, he that keepeth Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep ;"¹ his eye is always open, his mind ever on the alert ; for which reason the word "wake" is exchanged for "keep." God may wake,—as a matter of fact, He always does wake,—but He does not keep watch and ward except for those who commit themselves to his providential care, "praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance."²—Nehemiah, in building the walls of Jerusalem,—a work which was not only discouraged by the scoffs and taunts of the enemies of the Jews, but threatened to be obstructed also by the active opposition of an armed force,—seems to have been mindful of these words of Solomon, and to have acted upon them ; for we are told that, while he posted sentinels to protect the rising wall of the city, his first resort was prayer ; they "conspired all of them together to come *and* to fight against Jerusalem, and to hinder it. Nevertheless we made our prayer unto our God, and set a watch against them day and night, because

¹ Psalm cxxi. 4.

² See Eph. vi. 18.

of them.”¹ We, too, as Christians have a building,—an interior, spiritual fabric, on the rearing of whose walls, amidst the scorn and opposition of spiritual foes, we are, or ought to be, engaged. St. Jude bids us “build up ourselves on our most holy faith,”² raising upon the foundation of the truths of the Gospel, which we receive and believe, the superstructure of Christian graces and a holy life; and in vain we shall seek to see this fabric rising beneath our hands, except, while we build, we “pray in the Holy Ghost,”³ as the Apostle also exhorts. We must, indeed, as he says, “keep *ourselves* in the love of God,”⁴ by watchfulness; but it will be all in vain, except God should Himself keep us in his love, through his strength invoked into our souls by prayer,—“Praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God.”

This Prayer in the Holy Ghost is our subject in the present Chapter.

We will found our observations upon that account of the prophet Daniel’s prayer to God three times a day, which, almost better than any other passage of Scripture which I can recall, impresses the lesson that has to be conveyed. Daniel, cast into the den of lions for bravely refusing to comply with an ungodly decree, entitled himself to the crown of martyrdom as fully as those primitive Christians, who were not only exposed to wild beasts, but devoured by them; he was a martyr in will, though in his case the protection of the angel, who was sent to shut the lions’ mouths, prevented him from being a martyr in deed. The word martyr means a witness; a martyr is a witness to some truth which he confesses, and which

¹ Nehem. iv. 8, 9.

² Verse 20.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Verse 21.

he is ready to die for confessing. What was the truth which Daniel confessed, and for confessing which he was cast into the den of lions? I answer, the truth that continual prayer to God is indispensable,—nay, indispensable even for a single day. Indispensable for what? Indispensable for the carrying on of the spiritual life. If Daniel, in compliance with the royal decree, had discontinued prayer for a month, resuming it again at the expiration of that time, a wrong impression would have been left upon the minds, both of his own exiled fellow-countrymen, and of the heathen courtiers of Darius, as to the true nature and necessity of prayer. Instead of a needful function of spiritual life, deeply founded in the relation between the Spirit of God and the finite spirit of man, it would have appeared to them (and doubtless the heathen, and perhaps some of Daniel's companions in exile, did think of it as nothing more) to be only a means of relieving the pressing wants of man on any emergency, and also, of course, an acknowledgment of, and an honour done to, the deity to whom it was addressed. That so poor and shallow a notion of an exercise so exalting, so ennobling, so purifying as prayer, should find place in men's minds, and perhaps should content even some of the more worldly-minded Jews, and be acquiesced in by them,—Daniel cannot endure this; he must enter his protest against it, cost him what it may. I say, he must enter his protest; and because he must enter his protest, his prayer must be open to inspection, exposed to public view. So saintly a man could not have been ignorant that true prayer may be offered in the mind and heart,

amid the exigencies of business,—that short and fervent ejaculations are sometimes the most acceptable and the most effective form which prayer can take. And as to stated prayer, a man in his position might of course have commanded absolute privacy, had he pleased. Private prayer, as a rule, should be transacted in private. “Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door,”¹ was, as we know, our Divine Master’s rule for the exercise. Yes; when there is a temptation to show off our goodness, and to gain the praise of men, absolute privacy is, as Daniel’s own saintly heart must have told him, the right rule. But the temptation here is to conceal convictions as to the necessity and indispensability of prayer, for fear of the den of lions. In this case, then, publicity is necessary as an acknowledgment of God, in the face of the world, by his creature and servant. So down on thy knees, Daniel, three times a day, after the model of the sweet Psalmist of Israel, “Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray,”²—and bear thy witness, like a brave servant of God, to the truth that prayer, in virtue of its very nature, must be, as the Apostle afterwards prescribed, “without ceasing”!³ Open the windows of thy chamber wide, and let those prying satraps gaze their fill, while thou liftest up thine eyes to Him that dwelleth in the heavens, to the God that heareth prayer.

Let us now seek to understand the grounds on which the indispensability of constant prayer rests, this being the truth, in attesting which Daniel so nobly risked his life.

¹ St. Matt. vi. 6.

² Psalm lv. 17.

³ See 1 Thess. v. 17.

Prayer has been well called the soul's breath of life. It is truly and really so ; the resemblance between prayer and the act of breathing is not a fanciful resemblance, but one seated deep in the analogy between Nature and Grace, and in the fact that both the realm of Nature and the realm of Grace are from the hand of one and the same Author. Let us follow out for a minute or two the resemblance between the natural act of breathing and the spiritual act of prayer. In the breathing, by which natural life is continued, there are two distinct processes, one following close upon the other,—inhalation, or the breathing-in of the air, exhalation, or the sending of it out,—the chest contracts and expands alternately with the performance of these functions ; and to perform these functions is to live. Similarly in the spiritual world, prayer has in it a double process,—a receiving and a giving,—an inspiration from God, and an aspiration towards God. The inspiration must come first. No real prayer was ever offered except by God's grace prompting the heart to offer it, or at least making the heart uneasy and restless until it was offered. Then, following on the inspiration, comes the aspiration towards God, some petition to Him for some blessing He has to bestow, the best of all blessings, that which alone can fill the soul, and satisfy all its cravings, being Himself, according to that deep saying at the beginning of the Confessions of St. Augustine ; "Thou hast made us for Thyself ; and (accordingly) our heart is restless until it finds rest in Thee."

But I am sure that we are all of us apt to run off

with half a truth respecting prayer. We regard it indeed as a petition to God, an aspiration towards Him, but ignore the other half of the truth, that in all real prayer there is also a continual reception from Him, a continual inspiration by Him. I say a *continual* reception and inspiration, to intimate that we are to look to God not merely for the primary impulse which drives us to the throne of grace, and, if I may so say, sets prayer agoing, but also for answers made to us while we pray, if not in the outward arrangement and Providential disposition of things, at least in the depth of our own hearts and consciences. The true God is a living God, that is, a hearing and a speaking God, a God who shows that He hears what is said to Him by answering his worshippers. I am persuaded that we often miss of the answer, and so of the comfort and support which we might receive from prayer, because we do not look for it. We wind up our minds, and make the necessary strain upon our attention, and offer our prayer as a piece of duty, but we do not, while we offer it, and after offering it, "stand upon our watch," as the prophet did, "and set us upon the tower, and watch to see what he will say unto us."¹ What I wish to convey is briefly but most comprehensively expressed thus by a modern authoress; "Prayer is a dialogue, not a soliloquy." We are apt to regard it as a soliloquy, a mere piece of edifying self-communing. But this is to turn prayer into meditation, which is a distinct religious exercise. One of the essential conditions of prayer is, that we shall realise, while we offer it, that God is present with us, listen-

¹ See Hab. ii. 1.

ing intently to us, scrutinising our hearts, understanding at a glance what our real wish is under all the imperfectnesses of our expression, and giving intimations every now and then that He is listening by the movements and whispers of his Infinite Spirit within our finite spirit.

The reciprocity, which seems to be an essential part of the idea of prayer, is doubtless one of the truths figured by the great bright ladder which Jacob saw in his vision on the first night after his setting out for Padan-aram.¹ The better home of the Heavenly Father, and the ordained Channel of holding communications with Him, were revealed to him for his consolation and encouragement, when his heart was wrung by the recent parting from his earthly home, and from the parents whom he knew not whether he might ever see again. The flight of stairs reaching up to the stars,—nay, beyond the stars to the very throne of the Divine Majesty,—represented the Divine-human Mediator, through whom alone we can come to the Father, set up upon the earth in his humanity, reaching to heaven in his divinity. On this golden stair were seen by the patriarch the angels of God, not ascending only, but descending also. If human prayers, and supplications, and thanksgivings, are borne upwards by the ascending angels, what shall we suppose to be borne downwards but messages of grace, mercy, and peace? A glimpse is opened to us of an angel descending with one of these messages in that garden of the Agony, where was given, in reference to our Lord's own sore temptation, the counsel to "watch and pray." For "there

¹ See Gen. xxviii. 10 to 18.

appeared unto him," says St. Luke, "an angel from heaven, strengthening him,"¹—one of those bright spirits, all aflame with zeal and love, who had adored Him from all eternity as the only begotten Son of the Father, one of the same possibly who had "come and ministered unto him"² after his earlier conflict with the evil one. And the result of that heavenly refreshment, that divinely-given strength, was to elicit still more earnest prayer from the human spirit and soul of the Redeemer,—“being in an agony he prayed more earnestly.”³ O follower of Jesus, an heir of sinful flesh and blood, for what trials wouldst thou not be more than abundantly compensated, if a visible angel were to be sent to thee from heaven, bidding thee to endure among thy trials, and quit thee like a man, and be faithful unto death, that so He might give thee the crown of life. But in the marvellous condescension and compassion of thy God, better and higher messages than can be given by the ministry of angels, communications which enter more profoundly into the springs of thy inmost being, shall be made to thee, if thou “continuest instant in prayer,”⁴ and then watchest to see what He will say unto thee. The dove which Noah sent forth out of the ark came back to him twice, and the second time with an olive leaf, the well-known emblem of peace and reconciliation, plucked off in her mouth.⁵ Beautiful emblem of prayer, which George Herbert calls “God’s breath in man returning to his birth”⁶—

¹ St. Luke xxii. 43.

² See St. Matt. iv. 11.

³ See St. Luke xxii. 44.

⁴ See Rom. xii. 12.

⁵ Gen. viii. 8, 9, 10, 11.

⁶ “Prayer” (the first of the two Poems on that subject), *English Poems of George Herbert*, p. 47 [Rivingtons, MDCCCLXXX.]

prayer, which can only be offered under the influence of that Spirit who descended upon the Divine Master "in a bodily shape like a dove,"¹ and, being sent forth by us towards heaven, returns once more to the heart which sent Him forth with a message of peace and consolation,—God's own olive leaf in the mouth of his own dove. Look then, Christian, when thou prayest, for an answer,—if not always in outward circumstances, yet in the realm of the inner man, in that screened sanctuary, where the lamp of the consciousness always burns before God. And specially look for an answer in the day when temptations beset thee (and, if thou art sincerely bent on serving the Lord, what day shall be exempt from temptations?²), for is not God's word pledged to answer thee under such circumstances? Has He not said; "Call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me."³ The clause "thou shalt glorify me" shows that the soul is perfectly *conscious* of the deliverance, and of its being vouchsafed in answer to prayer.

Now, if prayer be indeed the breath of the regenerate or spiritual life, not in any figure of speech or by any fanciful conception, but in reality and fact, how absolutely indispensable *must it be*,—the truth this to which Daniel set his seal, when he still persevered in prayer with the den of lions in prospect! Could the body live a day, nay, an hour, without breathing? Neither can the immortal spirit, created for communion with God, live a day

¹ See St Luke iii. 22.

² See Eccles. ii. 1. "My son, if thou come to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul for temptation."

³ Psalm l. 15.

without praying. And you and I, how many days of our lives have we passed without praying,—kneeling down possibly at our bedside morning and evening and reciting a form, but without the faintest aspiration towards God, or a breath of inspiration from Him! What must have been the condition of our souls on those days? They must have been dead, so far as the energies and motions of spiritual life are concerned. Happy was it for us, and an effect of God's mere grace and longsuffering, if the regenerate life communicated to our soul in our Baptism was not so completely extinguished by those prayerless days, as never again to rouse and rally itself under the quickening breath of God's Spirit,—if our deadness on those days was only that of hibernating animals, who are torpid and motionless during the rigours of winter, but revive again with the warm breath of spring. Yet suspended spiritual animation, even for a day, how dreadful must it be! and how perilous! to how many spiritual dangers must it lay us open! what advantage of it may be taken by our spiritual foes, ever on the watch for their occasion! At the very best, how does it narrow our capacity for future blessedness, which might have been expanded by communion with God, and dash a jewel from our heavenly crown!

Thus have we attempted to show the nature and necessity of the prayer which our Lord, in his great counsel of the Agony, instructed his disciples to mix with watchfulness if they would guard themselves, not indeed against the experience of temptation, but against allowing temptation to gain any foothold in

their heart. Such prayer is in its nature ceaseless, consisting as it does not so much in any formal exercise as in holding constantly open the avenue by which the soul communicates with the unseen world. Such prayer cannot be without an habitual realisation of the presence of God, for this is the very basis and foundation of it. "Thou God seest me"¹ is the thought, or rather the consciousness, from which this prayer arises, and by which it is engendered. Practise it as perfectly as thou canst, and at least aim at perfectly practising it; and when thou art conscious that thou fallest short, ask pardon, and recall thy mind as soon as may be to the Divine presence, as a falconer recalls to his hand by the jess-string the hawk to which he has allowed a temporary flight. And thou shalt find that the two parts of this Divine counsel are inextricably interwoven, that Watchfulness and Prayer are interdependent and must live and die together,—two distinct exercises indeed, but which God hath joined together, and so closely that man may not put them asunder.

¹ Gen. xvi. 13.

CHAPTER XI

THE DIVINE MASTER'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR PRIVATE PRAYER

But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.—
ST. MATT. vi. 6.

IN the foregoing Chapter we considered the indispensability of prayer on abstract grounds. We saw that in no figure of speech, but really and truly, it is the soul's breath of life, a function as essential to the life of the human spirit as successive acts of inhalation and exhalation are to that of the body. But it is a counsel of the Divine Master for the spiritual conflict which we are now expanding and expounding,—the counsel wrapped up in those two pregnant words, "Watch and pray."¹ And as the Divine Master said much upon the subject of prayer, and not only gave to his disciples abstract instructions as to the manner in which this duty should be performed, but also furnished them with a model prayer for their guidance,²—a prayer embracing in the fewest possible words all the legitimate desires

¹ St. Matt. xxvi. 41.

² See St. Matt. vi. 9 to 14; St. Luke xi. 2, 3, 4.

and aspirations of the Christian,—we cannot fill out in its just proportions the counsel “Watch and pray,” without placing before ourselves the chief lessons, at all events, which the Master has left behind Him on this subject, already shown to be so vitally concerning. It would unduly protract this treatise to consider everything which Christ has said respecting prayer, and to look at it under all the various lights in which He has placed it. But the main features of his teaching on the subject will not escape us, if we consider the counsels which He gave for prayer, as conditioned by the number of persons joining it,—in other words, for private and for public prayer,—and also what He said as to the spirit which should animate all prayer, and as to the conditions necessary to ensure its success.

And first, as to his counsel for Private Prayer, contained in a single verse of St. Matthew’s Gospel, which stands at the head of this Chapter. It took its rise, as (speaking generally) we may say that all our Saviour’s teaching did, from an occasion,—from something which had met his eye in the ordinary devotions of the professedly devout. On a later occasion we are told that “Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury,”¹—not only watched them *as* they did it, but observed *how* they did it. When they offered prayer, too, his eye was upon those that offered it; and He had noticed how they courted publicity in their prayers, wishing to have the credit of being pious, religious men. This desire for publicity, He taught, vitiated the prayer as regarded its acceptance with

¹ St. Mark xii. 41.

God, and precluded any hope of acknowledgment by Him or recompense from Him ;—"When thou prayest, thou shalt not be as the hypocrites *are* : for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and in the corners of the streets, that they may be seen of men. Verily, I say unto you, They have their reward"¹ (better, as the Revised Version gives it, "they have received² their reward," implying that there was an end of the reward ; it was exhausted ; there was nothing more to come). "The fashion of this world passeth away ;"³ and the Pharisaic fashion of ostentatious prayer, which courted the eyes of the world at the street-corners, has long since become extinct with the Pharisees that practised it ; but does not the Pharisaic spirit still survive, and in so far as it influences the devotions of Christ's disciples, vitiate them ? What is, at least in great measure, the motive, which draws such numbers to Church in

¹ St. Matt. vi. 5.

² So the same Greek verb, and in the same tense, is rendered in the Authorised Version of St. Luke vi. 24 ; "Woe unto you that are rich ! for ye *have received* your consolation" (ὅτι ἀπέχετε τὴν παράκλησιν ὑμῶν). The preposition (ἀπὸ), with which the word "to have" is compounded in these passages, seems to give the notion of receiving something as *an adequate compensation*. The notion of adequacy or sufficiency is brought out sharply in that meaning which the third person singular of the present tense (ἀπέχει) sometimes has ; "Sleep on now, and take *your* rest : *it is enough*, the hour is come" (St. Mark xiv. 41.) We trace the same notion of sufficiency, fulness, complete satisfaction, in St. Paul's expression of contentment with what his Philippian converts had sent to him (Phil. iv. 18) ; "But I have all" (ἀπέχω δὲ πάντα)—have all to my heart's content, and want no more, am quite satisfied,—"*and abound ; I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you.*" And again, the same idea of *sufficiency* in the compound verb peeps out very distinctly in that lovely passage of the Epistle to Philemon (v. 15) ; "For perhaps he" (Onesimus, thy once fugitive slave) "therefore departed thee for a season, that thou shouldst receive him for ever" (ὅνα αἰώνιον αὐτὸν ἀπέχῃς), rather "*possess him for ever,*" to thine eternal contentment and satisfaction.

³ 1 Cor. vii. 31.

large cities on Sunday mornings, but this, that it is the habit of good society in this country to attend Church once on Sunday, and that, therefore, their good name might be somewhat compromised if they were to neglect all public religious observance? If this motive did not operate to secure attendance from many, would not our congregations be very much thinner than they are? When the Englishman is in foreign parts, where, being out of his own local circle and comparatively unknown, he has no character to lose, is his attendance upon Divine Worship, wherever the opportunity is offered, as punctual and regular as in his own country? O Divine Master, whose "eyes" are "as a flame of fire,"¹ and who with those keen and searching eyes still beholdest how the people pray, and how they give alms, how does thy scrutiny, as Thou surveyest us, detect the hollowness of many a religious act, which on its surface is fair-seeming, and as such receives the meed of human praise!

So much for the occasion of this counsel. But what is the tenor and substance of it? The Divine Master here teaches that the prayer which is to win the praise of God, which He is to acknowledge and reward, must be essentially a secret transaction between the Heavenly Father and the soul,—nay, that it must be a secret transaction, even when offered in public, and when others are around us. "Thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet," (into some secret chamber of thy house; and even so privacy is not sufficiently secured,—you must exclude others); "and shut thy door," so that no one may

¹ See Rev. i. 14.

interrupt thy prayer, or observe what thou doest, as he passes by. The first requisite for private prayer is withdrawal from human society. Seek some place where you can be absolutely alone, as the Divine Master Himself did, thus exemplifying his instructions in his own practice ; “ And in the morning, rising up a great while before day,” (literally, “ while it was very dark”¹), “ he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.” And again we read that when “ great multitudes came together, to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities, he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed,” the original Greek here intimating (what it is difficult to express without circumlocution in a translation) that this withdrawal into some solitary place for prayer was the Lord’s usual practice ;² —the exigencies of his ministry might necessitate, did necessitate, a life of great publicity, so much so, that he not unfrequently experienced inconvenience from bodily pressure, and on one occasion “ spake to his disciples, that a small ship should wait on him because of the multitude, lest they should throng him ;”³ but even on his busiest and most public days it was his habit to seclude Himself for secret communion with his Father. His recorded words and conduct, on receiving intelligence of the death

¹ *πρωτὲν νυχθον* *λίαν ἀναστὰς*, St. Mark i. 35.

² *Αὐτὸς δὲ ἦν ὑποχωρῶν ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις, καὶ προσευχόμενος*, St. Luke v. 16. The Revisers seem to have felt the difficulty of giving the exact force of the original words without periphrasis ; for they allow the Authorised Version of the verb to stand ; —“ he withdrew himself.”

³ See St. Mark iii. 9. The boat went from point to point along the border of the lake, as our Lord walked along the bank, and was ready at any time to receive Him, and carry Him out for a few yards, that He might be revived by the breezes which frolicked over the water.

of his forerunner, St. John the Baptist, convey to us the double lesson of the absolute necessity, especially in a busy life, of devotional retirement, and of the sweet graciousness with which any frustration of our endeavours after such retirement should be met. "Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place," He said to his disciples, craving, no doubt, for a quiet hour in which to meditate on the deep significance of the Baptist's death to Himself, and to the dispensation of grace and salvation, which He had come down from heaven to inaugurate, "and rest awhile: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat." But his intention to retire was frustrated; the retirement had to be postponed for a while,—postponed only, not abandoned. "And they departed into a desert place by ship privately. And the people saw them departing, and many knew him, and ran afoot thither out of all cities, and outwent them, and came together unto him. And Jesus, when he came out" (came out, probably, from some cave or deserted hut, to which He had retired), "saw much people, and," so far from being irritated at this crossing of his purpose, and accounting their appearance at the spot an unwarrantable intrusion upon his leisure, had nothing but a heart of love for them, and a hand of help, and a tongue of heavenly lore,— "was moved with compassion toward them, because they were as sheep not having a shepherd: and he began to teach them many things."¹ So St. Mark. St. Matthew records besides that He added works to words of grace,— "he healed their sick."² Then,

¹ St. Mark vi. 31 to 35.

² St. Matt. xiv. 14.

in the evening of that eventful day, followed the relief of the bodily wants of the people by the miraculous feeding of the five thousand with five loaves and two fishes. And now one might have thought that the Lord's bodily strength would have been exhausted, and that the powers of his human mind, which resembled our own minds in all respects, "sin only except," and therefore was much dependent upon bodily conditions, would have been unequal to further exertion. But it was not so. The more incessant and engrossing had been the work of the day, so much the greater was the need for privacy and prayer. So having constrained his disciples to get into the ship and cross the lake, and having dismissed the multitude, "he departed into a mountain to pray."¹ He had taught his disciples to enter into their closet, and shut their door, when they prayed, and He too would seclude Himself, when holding communion with his Heavenly Father, not indeed in the inner chamber of a house, for, while "the foxes" had "holes, and the birds of the air" had "nests, the Son of man" had "not where to lay his head,"² but in an oratory more appropriate to the Creator of the universe, "who layeth the beams of his chambers in the waters,"³ and "buildeth his stories in the heaven,"⁴—in the grand solitudes of Nature, the wilderness, and the mountain-fastness, far removed from the stir and tramp of human life, and from the strife and hubbub of tongues.

But to come down from the high ideal, as exemplified in the Divine Master, to the practical

¹ St. Mark vi. 46.

² See St. Matt. viii. 20; St. Luke ix. 58.

³ See Psalm civ. 3.

⁴ See Amos ix. 6.

realisation of the precept in the daily life of the disciple, under the limitations which his circumstances and capacities lay upon it. How can the poor (for whom the lesson must have been intended ; for the Lord was "anointed to preach the Gospel to the poor,"¹ and to the poor He did preach it, a main part of his description of his own ministry, while it was in progress, being this, "To the poor the gospel is preached,"²)—how can the poor, or at least the very poor, yield a literal fulfilment to this precept ? They have no "closet" into which they can enter ; home (if indeed such an habitation as theirs can be called a home) offers to them no place of privacy, in which they can seclude themselves, and be alone with God. Father, mother, children, have but one room for all the purposes of domestic life, a room necessarily noisy from the number of its inmates, and the age of some of them,—a room which echoes with distracting cries from morning dawn till the hour when the members of the household drop asleep. Many of them live, moreover, in the midst of densely-populated cities, from which their occupations permit no egress, except on some general holiday for all classes (an event of rarest occurrence) ; resort to the green fields or to the hill-side, for the purpose of lifting up their heart to the Heavenly Father, is as much out of the question for them as the finding a place of privacy at home. How then is the Divine Master's direction, "Enter into thy closet, and shut thy door," to be literally fulfilled by persons in their case, for whom, as has been already said, it must nevertheless have been meant ? To throw churches open all

¹ See St. Luke iv. 18.

² St. Luke vii. 22.

day long for private prayer, so that the poorest person may feel that he can command a place of comparative privacy there, and a place of absolute silence, this would seem to be the only solution of the difficulty. This plan is now adopted in very many of our Churches; and all that is needed is, that the poor of the district which lies around the Church should have their attention constantly called to the fact, and should be continually recommended to avail themselves of the privilege thus offered to them of seeking God, and making their requests known to Him, in comparative privacy. We must not be impatient because, where the opportunity is given, no one, or scarcely any one, is found to avail himself of it. It must be remembered that the general using of the Church for private prayer would imply an entire alteration in the devotional habits of our people, in whose minds ever since the Reformation the idea has been ingrained (and who, with the instructions of the Divine Master as to secret prayer before him, shall say that it is a wrong idea?) that home, and not the Church, is the place for private prayer. And the sway of habit, strong at all times and under all circumstances, is peculiarly strong in the matter of devotional observances; anything unfamiliar to us in the way of devotional observance is *ipso facto* uncongenial. But a dint will be made gradually upon the minds of the people by often admonishing them of the duty of private prayer, and of the high blessing annexed to it; "If thou wouldst have a heavenly recompense laid up in store for thee, to be bestowed on thee hereafter before men and angels, see that thou art

diligent in secret prayers,—prayers which no eye of man can note ;” and then by reminding them that, to meet the special needs of those, who cannot find a place of privacy at home, the Church stands open all day long, and may be so used at any time when the Public Service is not going on.—But faithfulness to the Master’s words, in the literal acceptance of them, obliges me to add that, in all pastoral exhortations on the subject, the use of the Church for the purpose of private prayer should only be recommended for those who have not, and cannot have, any place of privacy at home. Where there *is* an inner chamber, and a door which may be shut upon the world, there the inner chamber and the door must be used, as literally prescribed by Christ, and the Church must not be resorted to under the false impression, for which the New Testament gives no sort of sanction, that private prayer offered there is more acceptable than it would be elsewhere. Rather what the Lord says leads us to suppose that the best, the most suitable, the most thoroughly congenial place for private prayer is the secret chamber of the house, where our privacy can be entire and absolute, as it never can be in Church, if others use the sacred building for the same purpose ; and that the Church should only be recommended as a place of *comparative* privacy and quiet, for those who find domestic privacy and quiet out of their reach. The completeness of the seclusion which may be had in the closet is the great advantage which the closet has over even the Church. Human respect, and the possibility of taint to the religious observance from the intrusion of that motive, are thus shut out altogether.

And if it should be alleged in favour of a general use of the Church by all classes for the purpose of private prayer, that the objects which there meet the eye have a tendency to lift up the heart, it must be remembered that so to use the Church is to call in a sensuous aid to promote a spiritual end,—a policy of which the Bible everywhere makes us suspicious. It is true, indeed, that the principle is admitted in the two holy Sacraments of using sensible objects to remind man of spiritual truth ; but it must be allowed, looking at the general tenor and scope of the New Testament, that this admission is a sparing and cautious one, and that therefore the principle is to be cautiously and sparingly applied, wherever we have not God's Word to lead us by the hand. And be it remembered also that, looking to the philosophy of our nature, an impression derived from the senses makes its appeal, not to the spirit or highest element of our nature, by which directly and immediately we hold communion with God, but only to the soul or emotional faculty, which may be (and sometimes is) stirred vehemently without any corresponding action upon the reason, the will, the conscience. But I would appeal to the experience of spiritual persons, which, since we are informed that "he that is spiritual judgeth all things,"¹ must be a criterion of truth. Is it not the case that, so far from finding help in prayer from sensible objects, the tendency is rather to close the eyes by way of concentrating the thoughts?

Let so much be said respecting the literal observance of the Divine Master's precept, where a literal observance can be yielded to it. But the fact that

¹ 1 Cor. ii. 15.

circumstances are quite capable of being conceived (nay, are continually arising in the experience of men), where such an observance could not possibly be yielded,—this of itself indicates that, underlying the letter of this instruction, there must be an inner spiritual meaning, which lays all disciples under obligation universally and at all times. The precept can no doubt be fulfilled independently altogether of place or bodily surroundings. Those who are unable to find privacy anywhere without them, may find it within. Let the glorified Saviour, speaking from heaven, give us a clue of spiritual interpretation for the words which fell from his lips, while He was upon earth ; “Behold,” says He by the pen of his Evangelist St. John to the angel of the Church of the Laodiceans, “I stand at the door, and knock.”¹ Of what door is He speaking ; and to what does it give entrance ? Of the door of man’s heart, at which He knocks by the call of his word, by the dispositions of his Providence, by the movements of his Spirit, by judgments, by mercies, by the recurrence of natural seasons, by sudden changes of fortune for the individual, by revolutions in the history of the Church or of the world. The heart is the closet, the secret chamber, screened from public view, in which we may always meet, and hold communion with, our Father “which seeth in secret.” It may be regarded as a little sanctuary, concealed from the outer world, as was the holy place in the Jewish Tabernacle or Temple, by a veil, and in which is the solitary lamp of the consciousness, like the seven-branched candle-stick,¹ ever burning

¹ Rev. iii. 20.

² See Heb. ix. 2, 3.

before God. Not the having much business upon our hands, not even a throng and a press of men around us, can prevent our withdrawing from time to time, and presenting ourselves with our petition before Him who reads the heart at a glance, and "knoweth our necessities before we ask, and our ignorance in asking."¹ There may be prayer without local and external privacy. But without this internal spiritual privacy, prayer there can be none, whether in the closet, or in some solitude of Nature, or in the Church with other worshippers around us. It is the placing ourselves consciously in the presence of God, the realising that we are in his presence, which may be said to create this indispensable privacy. Nor is it enough, if we would hold communion with Him to any purpose, merely to place ourselves in his presence. The words of the glorified Saviour just referred to, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and

¹ Fifth Collect at the end of the Communion Service. In his "*Introduction to a Devout Life*" [Part II. chap. xii. 3.] St. François de Sales says very beautifully:—

"Remember then, *Philothea*, to make every Day sundry Retreats into the solitary closet of your Heart, whilst you are outwardly busied in temporal Affairs and Conversations: this mental solitude cannot be hindered by the company of such as are about you; for they are not about your Heart, but about your Body, so that your heart remaineth all alone, in the presence of God alone. This is the Retreat, which King *David* made, amidst so many Businesses, as he testifies in a thousand places of his Psalms: *O Lord, as for me, I am always with thee. I behold God always before me. I have lifted up mine eyes to thee, O my God, that dwellest in heaven. Mine eyes are always towards God.*"

[An Introduction to a Devout Life. Written originally in *French*, by S. Francis de Sales, Bishop and Prince of *Geneva*. Faithfully rendered into *ENGLISH*. London, Printed by *Henry Hills*, Printer to the King's Most Excellent Majesty, for his household and chappel, for *Mat. Turner* at the Lamb in High Holbourn, 1686, p. 156.] Copies of this Translation, made under the auspices of James II., are now rare. The writer has the good fortune to possess one.

open the door, I will come in to him," show that we have the power of opening the door,—that it rests with us to open it, when a summons is made to us to do so. And the power to open implies a corresponding power to shut,—a power which must be exercised, as the Divine Master instructs us, when we enter into the screened sanctuary of the heart, to hold communion with God. We must shut the door resolutely upon disturbing and distracting thoughts, upon worldly business and cares, and upon all impulses, however apparently innocent, which tend to divert the mind from the Divine Presence, that great object which is to be set steadily before it. Abram, when he had prepared his sacrifice by arranging the various parts of it, found it necessary to guard it against the depredations of the vultures ; —“when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away.”¹ And we, similarly, if we would not have our spiritual sacrifice defiled, dismembered, and spoiled, must drive away all unhallowed, worldly, carnal thoughts, and keep them away by shutting the heart's door upon them.

“And thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.” The nature of the promise annexed to the fulfilment of the duty is observable. It is not said that God will answer the prayer offered in secret, or that He will give the petitioner what he asks for, but that He will recompense or reward him. To the performance of the kindred duty of almsgiving, for which our Saviour had given similar instructions in the preceding section of the Sermon, is attached an exactly similar promise ; “thy Father

¹ Gen. xv. 11.

which seeth in secret, himself shall reward thee openly,"¹ This might have been more readily anticipated. Here there is the notion of something freely given to God for the service of the poor, for which a compensation, or species of repayment, is looked for; "He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord; and look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again."² But prayer is simply an asking of God to supply our needs, whether bodily or spiritual, and fasting (the instruction for which follows in the succeeding section, and to which exactly the same promise is annexed³) is simply the using of a means to control the flesh, and bring it into subjection to the spirit; and it might seem as if here the thought of recompence were somewhat out of place;—"thy Father shall give thee thy heart's desire, relieve thee, or bless thy act of self-control to a victory over the flesh," might have seemed a more appropriate promise to annex to the particular exercises recommended. But the Divine Master would hereby teach us that the Heavenly Father is so abundantly gracious as to regard both the secret prayer and the secret act of self-denial, though both of them are directed rather to our own welfare than to the relief of our brethren, as an acknowledgment of Himself, an acknowledgment founded on faith in Him (that principle without which "*it is impossible to please him*"⁴) and, as being an acknowledgment of Himself, to be acknowledged and recompensed therefore by Himself. The Holy Scriptures regard

¹ See Matt. vi. 3, 4.

² Prov. xix. 17, as given in the Nineteenth Offertory Sentence of the Communion Service.

³ See Matt. vi. 16, 17, 18.

⁴ See Heb. xi. 6.

all duty, whether to our neighbours or to ourselves, as standing upon, and resolving itself into, our fundamental duty to God, to whose image, whether in our neighbours or ourselves, we are to have regard ; and Christ can take no other view. And in respect of prayer particularly, it is important to observe how our Lord teaches us to regard it in its higher aspect, as an acknowledgment of God and a homage paid to Him ; because it is just this aspect of it which we are so constantly in danger of dropping out of sight, the result of which is that, being wholly engrossed, when we pray, with the thought of our own needs, we do not enough honour God in prayer by nourishing high ideas of the glorious attributes of Him, to whom we address ourselves, and by expecting from Him, in virtue of these attributes, great and large results. It may be taken as an assured truth that the more our prayer soars, and the less it grovels, the more filled it is with a desire to acknowledge the Heavenly Father, in his power, wisdom, and goodness, as the source of all our hopes, the greater will be the acknowledgment which He will make, the higher the recompense, both here and hereafter, which may be expected to accrue from it.

One short word of counsel shall sum up the instruction of this Chapter. When thou findest thyself thwarted in the endeavour after privacy in thy devotions, if the thwarting should arise from some demand made upon thee to help and benefit others, set before the eyes of thy mind the example of the Divine Master on that busy day, when the multitude defeated his purpose of being alone with his disciples, and resting awhile, and yet He did not find it out of

season to teach and to heal them until sundown, and even then would not dismiss them without bodily refreshment supplied by a miracle.¹ Say within thy heart, "I will have mercy, and not sacrifice";² and consider how much more advantageous to thy soul's health will be a work of mercy, either to the bodies or souls of men, done in a spirit of mercy, than an act of sacrifice, blessed as that may be in its own time and place. Thou touchest God, and bringest Him down unto thyself, not by faith only but by love also.³

But should the thwarting have arisen from some unforeseen accident, even if that accident should have been due in some measure to thy own negligence or indolence, endeavour to make up for the falling short in stated prayer by greater frequency of ejaculatory prayer. Strive to make thy heart on that day, more than it usually is, a little sanctuary, from which goeth up unto God continually the sweet incense of prayer and praise. Reflect often that nothing can shut thee out from holding spiritual converse with thy Lord, that the throne of grace and the mercy-seat are always open day and night, always accessible to all, and that nothing can bar thine approach to them, not the throng of society which is around thee, for "that is not about your heart, but about your body;" not the press of business which is on thine hands, for thine heart can escape from it for a moment or two, however close the demand which it makes upon thee, to prostrate thyself before

¹ See St. Mark vi. 30 to 47.

² St. Matt. ix. 13; xii. 7.

³ See this lesson taught by the Divine Master in St. Mark xi. 23, 24, 25.

God, to invoke his aid, to adore his goodness, to cast thyself down at the foot of the cross. "Do as little Children, who with one hand hold fast by their Father, and with the other gather straw-beries or mul-beries along the hedges : so you, gathering and managing the Affairs of this World with one hand, with the other hold always fast the hand of your heavenly Father, turning your self towards him from time to time, to see if your Employments be pleasing to him. And take heed above all things that you let not go his hand, and his protection, thinking to gather more ; for if he forsake you, you will not be able to go a step without falling to the ground. My meaning is, *Philothea*, that amidst your Affairs and ordinary Business, which require not so earnest an attention, you think more on God than on your Affairs ; and when your Affairs are of so great importance, that to be well done, they require your whole attention, then also from time to time look towards God, as they do, that sail on the sea, who to go to the land which they desire, look more up to Heaven, than down on the sea, whereon they sail : so will God work with you, in you, and for you, and all your Labours shall be accompany'd with consolations." ¹

¹ St. Francis of Sales. *Introduction to a Devout Life*. Part III. chap. x. § 5. *That we must treat of Business with care, but without Vexation or Solitude*. [Pp. 310, 311, in the Translation cited above, p. 126.]

CHAPTER XII

THE DIVINE MASTER'S INSTRUCTIONS FOR COMMON PRAYER

If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.—ST. MATT. xviii. 19, 20.

THE punishments of God are appropriate to the sins which call them down. And in like manner the blessings which God grants are appropriate to the conditions upon which they are granted. The passage which stands at the head of this Chapter contains our Lord's gracious promise to united or common prayer. His promise to prayer in the closet, which we considered in the last Chapter, was of a very different kind ; and we shall see, in considering the words before us, how wonderfully appropriate to the character of united prayer is the blessing which is here covenanted to it.

"If two of you shall agree." Two is the smallest number that can form a society. The most fundamental of all societies,—that which is the rudiment of the family, and of the state,—is composed only of two persons, man and wife. If there were but one petitioner, the prayer would be the secret one of the

sixth Chapter of St. Matthew,¹ to which already its own peculiar blessing of an open or public reward had been chartered, not united prayer. It is certainly observable how our dear Lord puts the blessing within the reach of the smallest conceivable number which can be called a congregation at all. We are sometimes apt to look down on very small congregations; and, when we see only two or three heads dotted here and there over the area of a large church, we are apt to whisper to ourselves, "It is hardly worth while having service at all for these few,—certainly it is not worth while having a sermon for them." But do we enough consider that the charter of united prayer is so drawn up as to include a gathering even of two in the Lord's name? God, in this as in other of his dealings with us, attaches his blessing to quality, not to quantity. If we "have faith" (sincere faith), even "as a grain of mustard seed,"² we may work great wonders thereby. And if only two meet in Christ's name, they shall find the blessing of his presence, and open heaven to themselves through his mediation.

"If two of you shall agree . . . as touching anything that they shall ask." This is the first condition on which the blessing is suspended; the two must "agree" on the subject of their petitions. As Ananias and Sapphira *agreed together* (the same word, both in the original and in the translation, which is used here) to tell St. Peter the same tale,³ so the two disciples, if they are to obtain what they ask for,

¹ Verse 6.

² See St. Matt. xvii. 20; St. Luke xvii. 6.

³ Acts v. 9. *Τὸ ὅτι συνεφωνήθη ὑμῖν πείρασαι τὸ Πνεῦμα Κυρίου.* The same word is used also of the labourers in the vineyard *agreeing* with the householder for a penny a day.—St. Matt. xx. 2, 13.

must agree together to tell the same tale of supplication in the ears of their heavenly Father. How may such agreement between worshippers be secured? It might conceivably be done by the minister and congregation meeting, before they pass into the church, and determining upon the petitions which they shall offer. It might be done by drawing up in writing heads of prayer, and distributing them among the congregation, so that each might know in substance, if not in actual words, what would be asked for. And it might be done, as we ourselves attempt to do it, by the use in church of a form of Common Prayer in the hands of all, so that all may know beforehand, not only what will be the things asked for in church, but also the very terms in which the petitions will be couched. But it would seem that it cannot be done without some previous concert or understanding, and that such congregations (if there be any) as meet together for united worship in entire ignorance of what the minister is going to pray for, are really not fulfilling the condition upon which the great promise to united prayer is suspended.

But let us look to our own shortcomings rather than to those of others. We have (by God's mercy, not by our own merit) a book of Common Prayer, which exhausts all that we can properly desire and ask, when we approach the throne of grace. But can agreement as to the objects of prayer be secured merely by the use of a *form* of Common Prayer? Surely not. The agreement which the Lord requires, and will regard, must be of the heart and mind, not of the voice.¹ Can it be supposed that, when persons

¹ It is true that the Greek word *συμφωνέω* (from which comes our

say or sing their responses, without meaning them, or even without thinking about them, there is any such agreement between them as to what they shall ask, as the Lord can be expected to give heed to? In order to any such agreement, there must be first a clear understanding in the mind as to the petition which is to be offered; and then a serious, deliberate will to ask for this particular thing; a movement of the mind to comprehend the blessing, and a movement of the heart to long after it. And in order to further this, it is most devoutly to be wished that the clergy of our Church would, much more frequently than they do, explain the Prayer Book to the people. This is a point of vast importance, if we really wish our worship to be efficient and honoured by the presence of our Lord. Some parts of the phraseology of our Prayer Book are antiquated, and require explanation to simple and uneducated folks. But even where the language of the Prayer Book presents no difficulty, how very few, even among the highly educated, have duly weighed the meaning of the petitions which they are taught to offer Sunday after Sunday! How few come to church with a serious and deliberate approval of the things which the Prayer Book sets down to be prayed for, understanding those things thoroughly, and willing them heartily! And the reason of this is, that they have from child-

word "symphony") indicates, according to its etymology, agreement of voice. But in both cases of its use in the New Testament referred to above (p. 133, *n.* 3), the agreement of Ananias and Sapphira as to the representation which was to be made to St. Peter, and the agreement of the labourers in the vineyard with the householder as to the wage they were to receive, it denotes merely a common understanding between two parties, without any reference as to the words in which that understanding is expressed.

hood been accustomed to repeat the Prayer Book by rote, but have never been led to exercise the mind upon its petitions.

"If two of you shall agree . . . as touching any thing that they shall ask . . . it shall be done," etc. But how *any thing*? Does our Lord really mean to say that if two of his disciples should take into their head any wild whim,—should conceive some dream of human ambition, or set their hearts fondly on some wordly bauble, the possession of which might do them a mischief,—their heavenly Father would indulge them? Assuredly not.¹ God never spoils his children; nor do his *true* children,—those who "have received the Spirit of adoption,"²—desire to be spoiled.—Observe that the "two or three," to whom the blessing is covenanted, are represented as being gathered together in Christ's name, *i.e. in the character of his disciples*, as persons instructed by Him in the right objects of human desire, and acting under his instructions. Such persons will very often pray for earthly blessings, but they will never do so—they dare not do so—unconditionally. The condition, "If it be for our highest good, and for thy glory," will always be mentally annexed to their prayers. Mingling with all their desires for earthly good, this undersong will always rise to the ears of their Heavenly Father; "Give me *not* my desire, O God, while Thou sendest leanness withal into my soul."³—So that, as the persons contemplated in the

¹ See the two immediately succeeding Chapters, in which the limitations are fully considered, with which those many Scriptural promises to prayer, which seem at first sight to withhold nothing from it, must be understood.

² See Rom. viii. 15; Gal. iv. 6. ³ See Psalm cvi. 15. P.B.V.

phrasing of the promise limit their desires within the confines of God's will and glory, the words hold true ;—" If two of you shall agree upon earth as touching *any thing* that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven."

Let us not fail to observe the parallelism of contrast in the conditional and the direct clause, to which the Divine Master no doubt designs to draw attention ; " If two of you shall agree *on earth* . . . it shall be done for them of my Father which is *in heaven*,"—a parallelism similar to that which we meet with in the third petition of the Lord's Prayer. Two simple persons, earnestly desiring some blessing at God's hand, seem but a feeble agency to procure such blessing. But it is true, nevertheless, that chords which are struck upon earth vibrate in heaven. The lightning glances and plays in the skies above, where it has its natural home ; but a small piece of metal will draw it down to a particular spot upon earth.

" For where two or three are gathered together in my name." It is worth observing how the higher spirituality of the New Dispensation above the Old comes into view here. The "where" of God's Public Worship under the Old Dispensation was a place,—a building,—in which, or towards which, all acceptable worship was to be offered. While Solomon, in the Consecration Prayer of the Temple, admits that the house which he has built "cannot contain"¹ God, every section of the prayer recognises the necessity of offering worship with certain local respects,—"that thine eyes may be open *upon this house* ;"² "hearken unto the prayer which thy

¹ See 2 Chron. vi. 18.

² *Ibid.* v. 20.

servant prayeth *toward this place* ;”¹ if they shall “pray and make supplication before thee *in this house*.”² But when the time had come that men should worship God, “neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem,”³ but “in spirit and in truth,”⁴ the “where” of Public Worship is no longer a place or building, but a congregation of believers gathered together in Christ’s name. Wherever such meet, in a building set apart for worship, or on a mountain, or in the forest, or on the sea-shore, there is a living temple which the Son of God will hallow by his presence in the midst of the two or three.

But again,—“where two or three are gathered together in my name.” To be “gathered together in Christ’s name” means to be gathered together *primarily* in the character of his disciples.⁵ Christians may, of course, innocently and properly assemble in other characters. When a great political gathering is held, men meet there as having a stake and interest in the State, and a voice, through their representatives, in the proceedings of the Legislature. When

¹ 2 Chron. vi. 20.

² *Ibid.* v. 24.

³ See St. John iv. 21.

⁴ *Ibid.* v. 23.

⁵ Literally translated, the words are, “Where two or three are gathered together INTO my name” (*συνηγμένοι εἰς τὸ ἑμὸν ὄνομα*); and we may compare the entirely parallel phraseology, “Baptizing them INTO the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (St. Matt. xxviii. 19); “baptized INTO the name of the Lord Jesus” (Acts viii. 16); and again, “even to them that believe *on* his name” (St. John i. 12), where the preposition translated “on” is literally “into” (*τοῖς πιστεύουσιν εἰς τὸ ὄνομα αὐτοῦ*). The preposition denotes union with Christ in his revealed character (or name). To “believe (or into) his name” is to be united to Him internally as our Prophet, Priest, and King, by believing that He stands in these relations to us. To be “baptized into his name” is to be united to Him externally as a member of his body. And to be “gathered together into his name” is to unite ourselves with other members of his body, for the purpose of offering united prayer and praise to God through Him, as “the one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. ii. 5).

the members of the Houses of Parliament assemble, it is in their character of members of the Legislature, and with the view of making sound and good laws. When members of the family gather round the common hearth at Christmas, it is as connected together by ties of blood—as linked in earthly relationship—that they meet. But when Christians meet together in God's house of prayer, it is as Christ's disciples that they come together, and every other characteristic which may distinguish them, save only that between the pastor and the flock, falls into the background. But of course this coming together as Christ's disciples involves some seriousness of thought as to the object and character of the meeting, and as to the significance of what is to be done there. A man may go to church—thousands do so—quite mechanically. It is a practice to which they have been accustomed from their earliest days ; it comes naturally to them when grown up ; it recommends itself to them as the habit of respectable society ; and they go to church as a matter of course, without ever giving an account to themselves of what they are doing. We need not deny that even such attendance on Christ's ordinances is frequently blessed, the person who gives it putting himself thus in the way of good, and being sometimes laid hold of by some word or prayer, which seems exactly to meet his needs ; but yet such an attendance is too external, implies too little of spiritual process in the mind of the person giving it, to justify us in saying that he meets his brethren "in Christ's name." To be "gathered together in Christ's name" must involve at least a perception of the blessings flowing from united prayer, and a desire

of participating in those blessings. But we may surely hope that in the considerable congregations which come together every Sunday in this country for public worship, *two* or *three* at least may be found, who come together with some amount of seriousness of purpose—enough, at all events, to bring the meeting under the category of “two or three gathered together in my name.”

And if so, what (by the terms of the Divine charter) is the blessing annexed to such meeting? It is the presence of Christ in the midst of them. Not merely, I apprehend, of Christ as God; for as God, and in his Divine Nature, He is and must be eternally and everywhere present. I take the words simply and literally, as indicating a mysterious presence of the God-Man amongst the worshippers, incomprehensible as to the manner of it, but, as to the fact, quite as real and true (though of course not as obvious to the senses) as was the presence in the “upper room”¹ after the Resurrection, when, “the doors being shut, came Jesus” (whom no doors could exclude), “and stood in the midst, and saith unto them, Peace *be* unto you,”²—quite as real and true as was the Lord’s presence in human shape with the

¹ See St. John xx. 19; St. Luke xxiv. 36; St. Mark xvi. 14; Acts i. 13. In the last of these passages the chamber used by the disciples for their assembling after the Resurrection is called τὸ ὑπερῶν (“the upper chamber,” R.V.),—the same word which is used to denote the room at Troas, in which “the disciples came together to break bread,” when “Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow” (Acts xx. 7, 8), and which room was the third floor (or storey) of a house (*ibid.* verse 9). The primitive and most ancient place for holding the assemblies of the Church was the uppermost storey of a private house, because this uppermost storey, extending over the whole area of the house, and not being cut up into compartments, could accommodate a larger congregation than the rooms on a lower floor.

² See St. John xx. 19.

three holy children in the furnace, which was confessed even by a heathen monarch,—“Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.”¹ So real and true is this Presence of Christ in the congregation, that if it pleased Almighty God to open our eyes, as, on a memorable occasion of old, he opened the eyes of Elisha’s servant,² we might actually see our Lord standing in the midst of the “two or three gathered together in his name”—his eyes of fire³ gazing keenly through the outward circumstance and attitude of devotion to their inmost hearts, his hand beckoning them to himself, his ear collecting their supplications, and his gracious lips interceding for them with the Father. So that in truth, having his own assurance for it, we may regard the public worship of Christians as being a species of sacrament, in which the human form and countenance of the worshippers is the “outward and visible sign,” and the presence of our Lord in the midst of them the “inward and spiritual grace.” It may be said, too, to have been “ordained by Christ Himself” in the passage now under consideration, and to be “a means,” in the use of which we may realise his presence, “and a pledge to assure us thereof.” Yes; “a pledge to assure us thereof,”—a thought this which, if duly laid to heart, might be helpful to us against distractions in public worship. Those distractions are apt to arise mainly from the throng of people around us, which has a disturbing influence upon the mind, and too often hinders that

¹ Daniel iii. 25.² See 2 Kings vi. 17.³ See Rev. i. 14.

concentration of the thoughts, which is essential to devotion. But once regard the human form, which in the congregation surrounds you on all sides, as the pledge of an underlying spiritual mystery, that mystery being the presence of the Lord Himself amidst the worshippers, in the glories of his Divinity, in the sympathies of his Humanity, in the exercise of his Mediatorial functions; and the hindrance is itself converted into a help. Nor can it be doubted, I think, that one of our Blessed Lord's purposes in manifesting Himself to his disciples after the Resurrection at uncertain intervals, and in different places, sometimes within closed doors,¹ sometimes on the shore,² sometimes on "the mountain where he had appointed them,"³ was to accustom them to look for his presence in their assemblies, even where they could not see it, and gradually to train them to realise by faith, after He should have been removed from them by the Ascension, the truth of his "exceeding great and precious promise," "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

In the light of what has just been said, contemplate now the force of the "for,"—a little particle, but of weightiest import. "Whatsoever they ask shall be done for them of my Father,"—why? FOR, though they seem to the outward eye to be, like the conies, "a feeble folk,"⁴ though there appear to be but "two or three" of them, and the world, in its arrogance, may look down upon such an assembly as incapable of achieving anything great, *they are really*

¹ See St. John xx. 19, 26.

³ See St. Matt. xxviii. 16.

² See St. John xxi. 4.

⁴ Prov. xxx. 26.

more than two or three; the Son of God is in their midst, and He is an interceding High Priest, who collects and presents their supplications for them, pleading for them at the same time his precious Blood and meritorious righteousness, so that their prayer, through his intercession, is sure of acceptance and of a favourable answer.

In view of this intercession of the great High Priest in the midst of the two or three, how beautiful and edifying is the arrangement of our Prayer Book, that at the end of each short prayer the name—the all-prevailing name—of our Lord Jesus Christ shall be made to ring, like a sweet chime, in the ears of our Heavenly Father. Let your minds glance towards Him as often as his blessed name recurs, and place in his hands that particular petition which is sealed therewith, and beg Him to offer it for you, that it may “be done for you of your Father which is in Heaven.”

And now can we fail to see the appropriateness of the blessing to the condition on which it is suspended? The blessing is the all-prevailing presence of the great High Priest. The condition is, that two or three shall be gathered together in his name. When Christian worshippers meet there is one added to their number—one whose presence in value and in efficacy outweighs all the hosts of men and angels. A vast multitude worshipping God, as in the dome area of St. Paul’s Cathedral, is a grand spectacle to the outward eye, no doubt. But such a service is not *necessarily* more effectual—has not *necessarily* more power to open the door of heaven—than one where the worshippers are in point of number con-

temptible. For when only two or three sincere Christians are gathered together in the name of Christ, there is something which has much more weight with God than a multitude, however vast. It is the Presence and Intercession of his Son. "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

It is not without a deep significance that the Father, "whom no man hath seen, or can see,"¹ is to be approached in the privacy of the chamber, with closed doors,² but the Son, the Incarnate Wisdom, who "was made in the likeness of men, and found in fashion as a man,"³ and who, even before his Incarnation, "rejoiced in the habitable parts of the earth, and his delights were with the sons of men,"⁴ is to be found in the assembly of "two or three gathered together in his name," where the human presence is the symbol and sacrament of his.

Two observations, arising out of what has been said, shall conclude this Chapter.

1. Let us be on our guard against confounding, with many devout and good men of the present day, the blessing of united prayer with the still higher blessing of the Holy Communion. We hear and read much about the real presence of our Lord in the Holy Communion. And without doubt He is really and truly, although spiritually, present in that Holy Sacrament. But then this, it would seem, is not *the* characteristic blessing of the Eucharist, but of something lower than the Eucharist,—of all ordinary public worship. *Union* with Christ, through a be-

¹ See 1 Tim. vi. 16.

² See Phil. ii. 7, 8.

³ See St. Matt. vi. 6.

⁴ See Prov. viii. 1, 12, 23, 31.

lieving reception of bread and wine in remembrance of Him,—this is the great *distinguishing* blessing of the Holy Supper. Of course union with Christ involves his real and true presence with us, but it goes beyond the presence, which is covenanted to the mere gathering of two or three in his name. If this distinction were thoroughly imbibed, it would preserve us from the doctrinal error of localizing the presence of Christ, that is of tying it up to the consecrated elements, and also from the practical error, which seems to be now gaining ground, of attending the Holy Communion without communicating. Such a practice is surely wanting in discernment, to say no more. If a man desires to place himself immediately under his Saviour's hand and eye, he may do so whensoever and wheresoever "two or three are gathered together in his name." But if he desires the higher blessing of close and intimate *union* with his Saviour, assuredly this is not to be had by coming to the Lord's Supper as a spectator,—it cannot be had but through the appointed channel of devout and faithful participation.¹

2. If what has been said about public worship is true (and resting on our Lord's own words, it must be true)—what a privilege do all those enjoy, who have daily opportunities offered to them of joining in such worship! Let us just put it to ourselves. Suppose that our Lord were visible in bodily presence at a certain place upon earth,—that this place was thrown open at certain hours for people to come and adore Him and seek his blessing—would not all (assuming them to be in a right state of mind) de-

¹ See the Appendix to this Chapter.

light to go thither, and count it a real privation when circumstances prevented them from going? What thronging would there be to that spot! what a prevailing sentiment among all thoughtful and good persons that half an hour spent in that Presence would sanctify the day or the week, and breathe over the mind that peace, which is so essential to the right fulfilment of duty. Well, this privilege, with the single exception of our not seeing our Lord with the eye of sense, is open to us continually—open to many of us, wherever there happens to be a daily service, every day. Might we not all make much more of the privilege than we hitherto have done, or have even sought to do? Might we not, by a deeper consideration of its exceeding dignity, make public worship,—aye, and family prayer,—a great means of advancement in the spiritual life? a great means of growing both in knowledge and grace? a great means of gaining that spiritual composure, that quiet sure trust in God, which is so essential an element in a right state of mind, and so very difficult to attain in an age of incessant activity and feverish excitement? One thing unhappily is certain, that according to the general law which governs our religious impressions, our characters will deteriorate under these privileges, if they do not improve under them. And improve they cannot, so long as we attend upon religious ordinances mechanically, without giving our minds to them, or throwing into them any seriousness of purpose,—without in some measure preparing ourselves for each of them. Let us prepare for united prayer by studying the Prayer Book intelligently, and by striving to realise the magnificence of the ordinances

in which we are to join. A great stream of incense,—the incense of prayer and praise,—is going up to God from all his houses of prayer all the world over. The supernatural Presence of the great High Priest is drawn down into the midst of the worshippers by the assembling of two or three in his name. Such exalted privileges could only have been partially and dimly realised in the worship of the Old Dispensation; and yet how did the worshippers find their delight in the homage which they offered, and in the temple which was the scene of that homage. To read their glowing expressions on the subject, how does it put us to the blush! “How amiable *are* thy tabernacles, O LORD of hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the LORD: my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God. . . . For a day in thy courts *is* better than a thousand. I had rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness.”¹ “One *thing* have I desired of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to enquire in his temple.”² And yet to this worship the Presence of the Incarnate God, which even in the days of his flesh made the second temple so far more glorious than the first had ever been, was never stipulated; nor, although God had promised that his “eyes should be open, and his ears attent unto the prayer”³ that was made in the temple, was any such large grant made of the objects of human desire as

¹ Psalm lxxxiv. 1, 2, 10.² Psalm xxvii. 4.³ See 2 Chron. vii. 15.

this ; “ If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven.” Oh ! how will the devout men of the Old Dispensation rise up in judgment with us Christians, and condemn us, for having availed ourselves so poorly of opportunities richer by far than any offered to them ! Oh, that God would open the eye of faith that we might see in every church, where two or three are gathered together for common prayer, a Jacob’s ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reaching to heaven—even the Presence of that Mediator who, being both God and man, bridges across the chasm between heaven and earth, and “ the angels of God ascending and descending upon ” the ladder of his mediation !

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER XII

I HOPE I shall be pardoned for quoting from a book of my own, published more than twenty years ago, a passage in which this thought is somewhat expanded and amplified :

“ We hear much of the spiritual Presence of Christ in connexion with the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper ; and the acknowledgment of this Real Presence, as distinct, on the one hand, from the Corporeal Presence, which is the Romish tenet, and, on the other, from the merely figurative Presence, which is the error of Zwingle, is made the test of orthodoxy. Nor can there be the slightest doubt that there is in the Eucharist a Spiritual Presence of our Lord Jesus Christ, recognised by the heart of the penitent believer ; that there is a broad distinction between this, and that carnal and localized presence which the Church of Rome maintains ; and an equally broad distinction between this, and the figure of a dying and absent Christ, to which some reduce this highest of Christian ordinances. But I would ask whether, although the Holy Communion unquestionably involves the Real Presence of Christ, this is its central idea, its leading thought ?

“ I humbly conceive that it is not. Where, in the Bible, or in the Prayer Book, is the idea of *the Presence* of Christ found in connexion with this Sacra-

ment? We are told that the elements are his Body and Blood, are the communion, or joint-participation, of his Body and Blood; that both parts of the ordinance are to be observed in remembrance of Him; that it is a showing forth or announcement of the Lord's Death; that except we eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, we have no life in us; that in eating the flesh and drinking the Blood of God's Son, Jesus Christ, our sinful bodies are made clean by his Body, and our souls washed through his most precious Blood; that his Body and Blood are verily and indeed taken and received by the faithful in the Lord's Supper, and that their souls are strengthened and refreshed by this spiritual food, as their bodies are by the bread and wine; that God hath given his Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, not only to die for us, but also to be our spiritual food and sustenance in that holy Sacrament; that if with a true penitent heart and lively faith we receive that holy Sacrament, then we spiritually eat the flesh of Christ, and drink his Blood; we drink in Christ, and Christ in us; we are one with Christ, and Christ with us; that the Body of Christ is given, taken, and eaten in the Supper only after an heavenly and spiritual manner; and that the means whereby the Body of Christ is received and eaten in the Supper is faith; but the ideas suggested by these passages are different from that of the Presence of Christ; and surely there is some risk in importing into the subject an idea, however true and orthodox, which is not immediately suggested by the Scriptural and Liturgical phraseology. The leading idea, which that phraseology *does* sug-

gest, is one which, while it involves the Presence of Christ, goes far beyond it; it is the idea of *union with Christ*, an union as close and vital as is the union of food with the living frame, which in process of time becomes part of the frame, and is undistinguishable from it. Of course, if our Lord be not really and truly in the Sacrament, we cannot be united to Him by means of the Sacrament; but the thought of union with Him is a higher and more blessed thought than that of merely being in his Presence. Indeed, his Presence is covenanted by his own words to the mere act of assembling in his name for united prayer,—a far lower act than that of Holy Communion. ‘If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.’ Doubtless this promise will apply with a peculiar emphasis to the celebration of the Holy Communion, inasmuch as then, most emphatically, do Christ’s disciples meet in their Master’s Name to plead his blood and merits, not in words only, but by a significant and efficacious action. But no one will limit the words to the Holy Communion, or exclude them from their application to ordinary congregational, or even family worship, when the Holy Communion is not administered.” [*Farewell Counsels of a Pastor to his Flock*, pp. 68-72. Rivingtons, 1867.]

I still entirely adhere to the distinction thus drawn, between the blessing of United Prayer and the still higher blessing of the Holy Communion.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHARACTER OF SUCCESSFUL PRAYER¹

Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you.—ST. MATT. vii. 7.

PRAYER, the great exercise of the spiritual life, may be viewed under two aspects and practised with two intentions, either as a homage done to God, or as a means of supplying human needs. Possibly it is for this reason that the subject of prayer is twice dealt with in the Sermon on the Mount, and that the sections which deal with it are separated from one another, and occur at different points of the argument of the Sermon.

In the earlier of the two sections—that of the sixth Chapter, in which the Lord's Prayer is given,—is found the warning against vain repetitions in prayer,—“When ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen *do*.”² “Use not vain repetitions” is an admirable rendering of a peculiar and somewhat rare Greek verb ;³ and one is glad to find that the Revisers, who have in so many instances departed from the well-known phraseology of the Authorised Ver-

¹ On the source from which the divisions of this Chapter are drawn, see the Postscript to the Preface.

² St. Matt. vi. 7.

³ βαττολογέω. Προσευχόμενοι δὲ μὴ βαττολογήσητε.

sion without sufficient cause, have retained it. The phrase "vain repetitions" implies, as should be implied (for other lessons of Holy Scripture on the subject of prayer are thus harmonized with this), that there *are* repetitions which are *not* vain. Our Lord in the garden prayed three times, saying the same (or nearly the same) words;¹ and St. Paul "besought the Lord thrice that" his "thorn in the flesh" (whatever that infirmity may have been) might "depart from" him.² On the other hand, in the later section of the Sermon on the Mount, where our Lord deals a second time with the subject of prayer, the warning against "vain repetitions" is balanced by a precept to be very earnest and importunate, as an essential condition of success,—not only to ask, but to seek, not only to seek, but to knock. What a marvellous equilibrium there is in Christ's teaching, as indeed there was also in his human character!

Sunlight wraps up in it all the colours which diversify the face of Nature, yet in such beautiful proportion and adjustment that no one colour gives its tinge to the compound, and sunlight is a pure and stainless white. Similarly, our Lord's teaching prescribed, as his character exemplified, every virtue; yet in such exquisite harmony, that neither in the teaching nor in the character does any one virtue preponderate. The great complex is simple righteousness without any particular tinge.

I have said, what indeed is obvious at the first glance, that the words which stand at the head of this Chapter teach earnestness and importunity in

¹ St. Matt. xxvi. 39, 42, 44; St. Mark xiv. 35, 36, 39, 41; St. Luke xxii. 41, 42, 44.

² See 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.

prayer. Though *vain* repetitions are forbidden, that recurrence to the throne of grace again and again with the same petition, which proceeds from fervour of spirit, and is merely an echo of the inward earnestness and desire of the heart,—this is so far from being forbidden, that it is prescribed, and prescribed with emphasis. It is evident that by this threefold injunction our Lord meant in general terms to teach the lesson of importunity in prayer, which at a later period of his ministry He enforced by the parable of the Unjust Judge ;—"he spake a parable unto them *to this end*, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint,"¹ and by the parable of the Friend at Midnight,² which supplements very beautifully that of the Unjust Judge, inasmuch as it represents to us the success of prayer for other people—of intercessory prayer—whereas, in the parable of the Unjust Judge, the widow's petition is simply for her own personal protection and vindication,—“Avenge me of mine adversary.” Such is the general force of the words of the text. But when we make a more minute examination of the passage (and God's Word, like his works, will bear examination with the microscope), we naturally ask whether the two latter clauses prescribe merely reiterated prayer, the offering of the same petition a second and third time with greater insistence, or whether we are not to understand by each of them some distinct form, some separate line of action, which the spirit of prayer is to take. That this is the case I am persuaded (for Holy Scripture is very sparing of its words, and, in all its parts, is abhorrent of tautology) ; and it is the distinct mean-

¹ See St. Luke xviii. 1 to 9.

² St. Luke xi. 5 to 9.

ing of the separate clauses which I shall endeavour in this Chapter to bring out, feeling sure that the subject has a very practical bearing, and that the right understanding of it will account for the unsuccessfulness of many earnest prayers, and teach the petitioners how they may hope to succeed.

I. First, then, "Ask, and it shall be given you . . . every one that asketh receiveth." The asking is simple prayer in the form in which it is commonly understood—the making known to God the needs and wishes of which we are conscious, in the hope that, if it be for his glory and our good, He will supply them,—“Be careful for nothing ; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”¹ The petition should be stated in the simplest words,—the simpler the better,—and it should be specific, as the petitions made by children to parents are,—not vague or general. As things are best understood by an example, let us take the case of Jacob's prayer, when after an absence of twenty-one long years he returned to the land of his kindred. He was sorely afraid of Esau his brother, whose wrath he had incurred by depriving him in a very unworthy way both of his birthright and of the blessing belonging to the firstborn, and who, when he had left home, had threatened and intended to kill him. He now hears that Esau is coming to meet him with four hundred men,—an army quite sufficient to destroy Jacob's whole family, and to carry off all the cattle which he had gotten during his sojourn with Laban. Accordingly we read that “Jacob was greatly afraid

¹ Phil. iv. 6.

and distressed." But he does the very thing which eighteen hundred years after St. Paul bade his Philippian converts do when they were tempted to be anxious about anything,—he cast his care upon God. In these few and simple words he let his requests be made known unto God by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving*. "Jacob said, O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, the LORD which saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will deal well with thee: I am not worthy of the least of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which thou hast shewed unto thy servant; for with my staff I passed over this Jordan; and now I am become two bands." (Observe how Jacob mixes thanksgiving for past mercies with his request for a present blessing, just as the Apostle instructs the Philippians to do; and learn from hence, when you pray, to cherish a spirit of thankfulness to God for what he has done for you in your past experience. But now comes the request; and see how simple and specific it is.) "Deliver me, I pray thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he will come and smite me, *and* the mother with the children."¹ And there can be little doubt that Jacob repeated this petition again and again with fervour and insistence. For his wrestling with the angel, and persisting in wrestling even after the angel had said, "Let me go, for the day breaketh,"² have always been understood to be a sort of outward visible sign of the agony of prayer and supplication, which his mind was going through,

¹ See Gen. xxxii. 6, 7, 9 to 12.

² *Ibid.*, verses 24 to 30.

amid all his discouragement and depression at the prospect of encountering his brother very shortly. He went on struggling against discouragement in prayer; he would not give over; he said to the angel, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me." And we know that his prayer prevailed with God; he carried away what he sought for; for God gave Esau such a conciliatory, generous, brotherly spirit, that Jacob found he had nothing to fear from him. "Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell on his neck, and kissed him: and they wept."¹ To Jacob, then, was the promise fulfilled; "Ask" (ask importunately, putting aside discouragements with a high hand), "and it shall be given you."

II. But now what is seeking, as distinct from asking? "Seek, and ye shall find . . . he that seeketh findeth." Let us endeavour to obtain an answer from our Lord's parable about seeking. "What woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find *it*?"² All the vows and prayers in the world would not discover for her the piece which she has lost; there would be no hope of success unless the furniture were moved aside, the candle and the broom used, and she herself on her hands and knees should carefully examine the chinks and crevices of the floor. Then by the seeking of St. Matt. vii. 7 (and St. Luke xi. 9) is probably meant the effort and endeavour which ever accompanies true prayer,—or, if that expression be preferred, prayer in the form of endeavour, prayer under the aspect of an effort after the thing prayed

¹ Gen. xxxiii. 4.

² St. Luke xv. 8.

for. Prayer, to be successful, must be more than a wish, which gives a momentary complexion to the surface of the soul, just as the conditions of the atmosphere give a momentary colour to the surface of the sea ; it must lay hold of the will, and become not an aspiration only, but a determination. And all determination leads to effort and exertion ; wishes are lazy, but the will is active and energetic. We ask, let us say, that sickness may be averted from our country and neighbourhood, or that disease may be arrested in the case of some one dear to us. Our asking must take the form of seeking as well as of simple prayer. We must bestir ourselves to make the best possible sanitary arrangements ; we must call in physician and nurse, and use their skill and care ; for it is upon the diligent and faithful use of means that God's blessing, which alone can achieve the desired end, is vouchsafed. Or is our prayer simply for victory over our temptations and besetting sins ? It must be accompanied with watchfulness,—or rather, watchfulness is the form which it must take when we pass from the closet into daily life. "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation."¹ And again, it must be accompanied by compliance with that precept, "Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."² We must *fight against* our spiritual foes, as well as pray, if the victory over them is to be obtained. The Amalekites would never have been defeated by Israel if, while Moses was holding up his hands in prayer "on the top of the hill," Joshua and his chosen warriors had not

¹ St. Matt. xxvi. 41 ; St. Mark xiv. 38.

² James iv. 7.

been fighting in the valley.¹ Prayer without watchfulness and resistance is a mockery. Watchfulness and resistance without prayer are a presumption. There must be seeking as well as asking.

III. And now what distinctive idea shall we suppose to be denoted by the third clause, "Knock and it shall be opened unto you . . . to him that knocketh it shall be opened"? Knocking doubtless denotes the expectation of an answer, an attitude of mind which is prepared to have an answer, and realises it before it actually comes. A beggar may ask for a dole of alms, in uncertainty as to whether he shall receive it; a woman may search the house for a lost coin, with no strong assurance that she shall recover it. But no one ever yet knocked at a house door without expecting that, if he knocked loud enough and long enough, somebody would come to open it. When St. Peter knocked at the door of the house of Mary the mother of John Mark, "where many were gathered together praying" for him, he felt certain of admission. Nor did he feel less certain because his admission was a little delayed by Rhoda's running back to announce to the friends within that "Peter stood before the gate." He did what every one would do under the circumstances; he "continued knocking." And the issue, of course, corresponded with his expectations,—the door was opened.² But we must not omit to observe that this third clause of the text is illustrated and emphasized by our Lord's own parable of the Friend at Midnight. "Which of you shall have a friend, and shall go unto him at midnight, and say to him, Friend,

¹ See Exod. xvii. 8 to 14.

² See Acts xii. 12 to 17.

lend me three loaves ; for a friend of mine is come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him ; and he from within shall answer and say, Trouble me not : the door is now shut, and my children are with me in bed ; I cannot rise and give thee ? I say unto you, Though he will not rise and give him, because he is his friend, yet because of his importunity he will arise and give him as many as he needeth."¹ Here there is a difficulty about admission. It is midnight ; the door has been closed,—bolted and barred as well as locked,—for the night ; and all the members of the family have retired to rest,—“I cannot rise and give thee.” Yet importunity, perseverance in knocking, turns the “I cannot” into “I must”—a *reluctant* “I must” in the earthly image, an “I must” which proceeds not from love, but is extorted by the urgency of the petitioner—but in the heavenly reality a joyful yielding of Him, “who is always more ready to hear than we to pray,”² to the sweet constraint of prayer ; as when the Son of God, having first met the poor Gentile woman’s request with several stern rebuffs, at length turned upon her with gracious smile, and threw open to her all the treasure-house of his bounty ; “O woman, great is thy faith : be it unto thee even as thou wilt.”³

And yet, notwithstanding this readiness of the Heavenly Friend to distribute, this willingness on his part to communicate, how few and faint are the applications made to Him ! Truly and forcibly,

¹ See St. Luke xi. 5 to 8. R.V.

² Collect for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

³ See St. Matt. xv. 22 to 29.

though very quaintly and tartly, does the late Arch-deacon Hare say, in one of the *Guesses at Truth* ; “As I recently was strolling down a street, I observed a cobweb which a spider had spun over the knocker of a house-door ; and I was surprised, for it was not the gate of heaven.”

It is not, however, I imagine, so much the mere insistence upon our petitions which is denoted by knocking,—though this, no doubt, is signified by the continued knocking of the friend at midnight,—as the attitude of mind in which they are to be offered,—an attitude of confident expectation. We must not think that everything is done when we have offered the prayer, but must wait and listen expectantly, as a man does when he has knocked at a door,—must stand upon our watch, like the prophet Habakkuk, and set ourselves upon the tower, and watch to see what God will say unto us.¹ And it is just because our prayers are so little animated with anticipation of the result, just because we so little comply with our Lord’s instruction respecting prayer, “What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them*,”² that our prayers are often so fruitless. We should be much surprised and taken aback if they were answered, as those early Christians, of whom we spoke just now, were astonished when on opening the door they saw St. Peter, for whose deliverance they had been praying.³ And what would such surprise indicate, but that we had not as fully and confidently expected our knocking at heaven’s gate to

¹ See Hab. ii. 1.

² St. Mark xi. 24.

³ See Acts xii. 16.

be answered as we should have done? Prayer can only live in an atmosphere of hope; taken out of that atmosphere, it expires instantaneously. And it was because no blessing can be received from God, except where the heart is in some measure quickened with the anticipation of it, that St. Peter fastened his eyes upon the cripple at the Beautiful Gate, and said, "Look on us." This injunction put the patient into the right attitude of mind for the miraculous restoration; "he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them."¹

Shall we err, then, in concluding that in the short but precious verse before us our Saviour teaches that in every successful prayer there are two other elements besides wish and fervent desire—a will which bestirs itself actively in the use of means, and also a faith which confidently expects results? Not as though the Lord were prescribing duties wholly distinct from prayer, which must be performed, however, alongside with it; but rather that He is teaching us that *true* prayer (and none but true prayer can be heard) involves and wraps up in itself the will to strive after, and the expectation to anticipate, no less than the wish to obtain the blessing prayed for.

And now, is there not in what has been said ample material for the exercise of self-examination? Go into the recesses of thine own bosom, my reader. What has been your experience of prayer? Have many (and as you thought sincere) prayers been offered with small comparative result? Does your character seem to improve little, though you are frequent in prayers for growth in grace, for increase

¹ Acts iii. 4, 5.

of faith, hope, and love? Then apply the touchstones which have been suggested. Has endeavour in the life been associated with prayer in the closet? Have all the means been used faithfully, diligently, zealously? Have you, after offering the prayer and making the effort, sufficiently cherished a bright sanguineness of mind as to the issue? For, after all, prayer is not to be narrowly conceived of, as merely an exercise for the closet or for the church. It is more than an exercise; it is a mental and moral attitude, and carries with it both the will, by which man resolves, and the faculty by which man realises the unseen,—forces these, by which every great exploit in the natural life of man has been achieved, and which, therefore, we may reasonably expect to see attended by great results when transplanted into the sphere of his spiritual life.

CHAPTER XIV

PRAYER AN INSTRUMENT OF DIVINE DISCIPLINE

In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night: and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness, that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father: and I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in. And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days.—1 KINGS iii. 5 to 13.

IN the Chapter succeeding that from which this passage is taken, the fulfilment of the promise to Solomon, as regards wisdom, is recorded in these terms: "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the sea shore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men. . . . And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."¹ The largeness of the offer made to Solomon, the object of making it, and the spirit in which the young king responded to it, are the chief points which claim our attention.

First, as to the largeness of the offer. We read that God, the Bountiful and Merciful One, in whose hands is a horn of plenty full-charged with every blessing, spiritual and temporal, appeared to Solomon at the close of a day spent in worship and in the public exercises of devotion, and gave him his choice as to what He should bestow upon him; "Ask what I shall give thee." The choice was given partly as an acknowledgment of the king's devotion, but partly also, no doubt, and mainly, as a test and trial of character. *Partly as an acknowledgment.* Solomon, at this commencement of his reign, had publicly acknowledged his father's God by making a very costly and royal sacrifice—he, like his father, would not "offer burnt-offerings unto the Lord" his "God of that which" did "cost" him "nothing";² at the chief place of worship in his kingdom, therefore, he offers

¹ 1 Kings iv. 29, 30, 31 34.

² See 2 Sam. xxiv. 24.

a thousand burnt offerings.¹ "He, whose are the cattle upon a thousand hills," says good Bishop Hall hereupon, "graciously accepts a small return of his own. It stands not with the munificence of a bountiful God, to be indebted to his creature. We cannot give Him ought unrecompensed. There is no way by which we can be so liberal to ourselves, as by giving to the possessor of all things."²

But it was doubtless principally *as a test or trial of character* that this option was given to Solomon. Probably no one test could be proposed for ascertaining a person's character, so searching, so exhaustive, so crucial, so generally satisfactory, as the asking what is his uppermost desire, the wish which lies nearest to his heart. By a man's character is meant the balance of his affections and his will; and how can this be tested so well as by asking what are his likes and dislikes, what he would choose and what he would refuse? God then put this question to Solomon in a practical shape, by saying to him, "Ask what I shall give thee." Herod, in his own little sphere, gave an option of a somewhat similar character to Herodias's daughter; and she passed on the option to her mother.³ And did not the request which was actually made on that occasion ("Give me here John Baptist's head in a charger") thoroughly lay open the character of Herodias, and exhibit her as a cruel and bloody-minded woman, who hated God's truth, and accounted any one who spoke it faithfully and uncompromisingly as a personal enemy, to be gotten rid of by all means? It

¹ See 1 Kings iii. 4.

² Bishop Hall's *Contemplations*.

³ See St. Matt. xiv. 7, 8; St. Mark vi. 22, 23, 24.

will be serviceable to us all in the great work of self-examination, and will reveal to us more of our own character than any questions regarding the particulars of conduct could, to ask ourselves every now and then, "If God were to give me the option which He gave to Solomon, what should I choose? upon what is my heart most fondly set? is there any passionate longing there, or any steady but strong inclination to one class of good things more than another?" A candid answer to such a question, after prayer to be put on our guard against the deceitfulness of our own hearts, might show us a great deal of ourselves.

The option given to Solomon, then, was a divine trial of Solomon in early life, as much a trial (though in a quite different form), as that to which God submitted Abraham, when he laid upon him the command (so grievous to flesh and blood) that he should slay his son.¹ And Solomon bore the trial nobly, and came out of it unscathed. He had just come to the throne, and it was the first of all thrones in the world, as being the throne upon which our Lord Jesus Christ was afterwards to sit, the throne over a people whom all their subsequent history has shown to be of strong, independent, fanatical character, whose indomitable spirit can never be quelled, and a people, as he himself says, who at that period of their history "could not be numbered nor counted for multitude."² Was Solomon puffed up by the height of worldly glory to which he had attained? Did his head swim with vanity, or with wild dreams of unbridled self-indulgence, as he stood on so high a pinnacle? Quite the reverse. He feels crushed by

¹ See Gen. xxii. 2.

² See 1 Kings iii. 8.

the responsibilities which are cast upon him ; he is humbled to the dust by the sense of his incompetency to fill his father's place, as indeed well he might be. The great scandal of David's own life (the murder and adultery of which he had been guilty) had, there is every reason to think, alienated several of his subjects from him. His growing infirmities, which led to a relaxation in the administration of justice, had given a plausible but shallow pretext, first to the rebellion of Absalom, and then to the revolt of Adonijah. Even at the auspicious season of his restoration, the heart-burnings had shown themselves among the tribes, which were to culminate eventually in the schism under Rehoboam. The very act of bringing back the king and royal family after the suppression of Absalom's rebellion had given rise to recriminations, which showed that civil discord, though smothered for a time, still smouldered, and was ready to flame out again, as soon as its embers should be stirred by some untoward event ; —“The words of the men of Judah were fiercer than the words of the men of Israel.”¹ Under such circumstances Solomon felt that he must be quite unequal to the duties of his new position, unless the Providence which had placed him in it should grant him an extraordinary measure of wisdom. How miserable would a man be, who should be called to command a ship, and to conduct her into port safely amidst hostile cruisers, without any sufficient knowledge either of naval tactics or naval warfare ! How miserable must every man be in a situation of which he knows he is not master ! Solomon therefore does

¹ See 2 Sam. xix. 41, *to the end.*

not for an instant doubt what he should ask for, when God gives him his choice of a blessing. In touchingly simple language he confesses his incompetency for his duties. His father, in his dying charge to him, had called him "a wise man";¹ but he himself says of himself, "I am a little child."² He asked to be suitably furnished for the responsibilities under which he had been recently laid, for the discharge of the duties to which he had been called. "Give thy servant," he says, "an understanding heart to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?"³ And it is added that "the speech pleased the Lord."⁴ Solomon had asked simply for grace to do his duty in a very difficult position. It was the proper, the right, the reasonable thing to ask for. And the God, who is "wont to give more than either we desire or deserve,"⁵ responded to the petition by enduing him, without labour, research, or study, with so large an amount of wisdom, as enabled him to outshine the wisest sages of his day, and brought distinguished foreigners from remote countries, to hear his almost oracular responses to questions and difficulties submitted to him.⁶ The moral discipline which God exercised, in offering to Solomon whatsoever he might please to ask, and the view to the public good of his people Israel, which He seems to have entertained in the whole transaction, these considerations lead us to the practical lessons, which the narrative has for ourselves,

¹ See 1 Kings ii. 9.

² *Ibid.* v. 9.

³ Collect for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity.

⁶ See 1 Kings x. 1 to 14.

² See 1 Kings iii. 7.

⁴ Verse 10.

so widely separated from Solomon in our circumstances, and in the methods by which Divine revelation is made to us.

Our Divine Master, then, has left words behind Him which seem at first sight and on the surface to give us a range of choice among the blessings of God, as wide and unlimited as was given to Solomon. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do *it*."¹ Four times do words similar to these occur in those most consolatory discourses of our Lord with his disciples on the eve of his Passion, which are recorded in the fourteenth and two following Chapters of St. John's Gospel;² and on two of these occasions the promise is preceded by those solemn words, which "the Amen, the faithful and true witness,"³ was wont to prefix to his weightier asseverations, as the seal and guarantee of their certainty; "Verily, verily, I say unto you."⁴ But lest we should suppose such a promise to be without conditions, inherent in the character of those to whom it was given, on one of the occasions a condition of very great stringency is annexed; "If ye abide in me" (as a body in the atmosphere in which it moves), "and my words abide in you" (animating and stirring you, as a soul animates and stirs the body to which it is united), "ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."⁵ And as what is called the interpretation clause of an Act of Parliament, though only recited

¹ St. John xiv. 13, 14.

² See St. John xv. 7; xv. 16; xvi. 23.

³ See Rev. iii. 14.

⁴ See St. John xiv. 12; xvi. 23.

⁵ St. John xv. 7.

once for all, must be held to rule the meaning of every clause in the Act, even where it is not so expressed, so this condition is to be understood as limiting and qualifying all those large and munificent promises which our Lord, more than any other teacher, was in the habit of making to prayer, as, for example, "Ask, and it shall be given you ; seek, and ye shall find ; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth ; and he that seeketh findeth ; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened."¹ Yes ; this condition and others, connected either with the Hearer of prayer, or with the petitioner, or with the thing which is sued for.

I. And first, there are certain limitations to the apparent universality of these promises, *which arise out of God's own character, and the relations in which He stands to his people.* He is, blessed be his name, and He has announced Himself to be, a hearer of prayer.² But while He is so, and will show Himself to be so on all suitable occasions, He is not a hearer of prayer and nothing else ; He never can abdicate the other relations in which He stands to us as our Father, our Judge, our Moral Governor, our Educator for Eternity. Moreover, God's hearing of prayer is not an end in itself, but only a means to an end. His way of dealing with the petitions which are laid down at his throne of grace is part of the educational discipline by which He is training his children for glory ; or it is an element in his moral government, or in his judicial procedure. Moses, one of his most highly favoured servants, very naturally entertained a strong desire to enter the promised Land. Hav-

¹ St. Luke xi. 9, 10.

² See Psalm lxxv. 2.

ing borne for so many years "the cumbrance, and the burden, and the strife"¹ of that stiff-necked people, and led them up to the very borders of their inheritance, was he not entitled to reap the fruit of his labours, and himself to enter into possession? Oh how very near this wish lay to the heart of the holy man! "O Lord GOD, thou hast begun to shew thy servant thy greatness, and thy mighty hand . . . I pray thee, let me go over, and see the good land that *is* beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon."² But it might not be. God had a prior duty to that of indulging the fond wishes even of a Moses—the duty of making an example of those who, in the exercise of the powers entrusted to them, put themselves forward, and seek not his glory purely and sincerely. God, as moral governor of Israel and of all the world, has a duty to others in this matter, as well as to Moses. And so the stern uncompromising refusal comes, "Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter . . . thou shalt not go over this Jordan."³—So also in the case of David's first child by Bathsheba—the child of sin and shame. David set his heart upon the child's recovery from sickness, "besought God for it, and fasted, and lay all night upon the earth."⁴ But God must severely punish David for the public scandal which his conduct had caused; and so the sentence is allowed to stand and is executed—"the child *that is* born unto thee shall surely die."⁵—A different phase of the Divine dealings with men is exhibited in the case of St. Paul. Thrice he besought the Lord that some

¹ See Deut. i. 12.² Deut. iii. 24, 25.³ Deut. iii. 26, 27.⁴ See 2 Sam. xii. 16, 27.⁵ *Ibid.*, verse 14.

great impediment to his ministry, which he calls his "thorn in the flesh" (some nervous affection, probably, of which the vision of our Lord in glory had been the occasion), might be removed.¹ It seemed so reasonable that, being an impediment to his ministry,—perhaps a stuttering, which to a public speaker cannot fail of being a great drawback,—it *should* be removed. But the Lord saw that its removal would not be for Paul's highest good, nor for the greater efficiency of his ministry. Paul had no sufficiency or competency in himself—was only sufficient in conscious dependence upon the power of his master.² That conscious dependence might give place to self-sufficiency, if he laboured under no difficulty in the delivery of his message; and this self-sufficiency would have weakened and lowered the spiritual force of St. Paul's character. And moreover, from the marvellous moral effects of the ministry of one who laboured under a natural drawback, Christ and his grace reaped all the glory; whereas, if the drawback had been removed, much of the credit might have been ascribed to the natural powers and qualifications of the ambassador. So the answer is not, "Be it unto thee even as thou wilt," but, "It is best for thee and thy work as it is," "My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."³ As just now we saw God *punishing* his children by the refusal of their prayers, so here we see Him *disciplining* them by such refusal.—Again, we may see Him granting prayer in anger and judgment, by way of impressing upon his people to a thousand generations that the gratification of the fond wishes of the

¹ See 2 Cor. xii. 7, 8.² See 2 Cor. iii. 5.³ 2 Cor. xii. 9.

natural heart may be the greatest of curses. When the Israelites loathed the manna, and lusted for flesh to eat, He "gave them their desire: and sent leanness withal into their soul."¹ When they said, "Make us a king to judge us like all the nations," and insisted on the request, though warned of the burdens to which it would subject them ("Nay; but we will have a king over us"²), He "gave them a king in his anger, and took him away in his wrath."³ All which instances go to show that, in granting or refusing prayer, God acts as a Moral Governor, and with reference to the interests, not of the petitioner only, but of those by whom he is surrounded, and who may need warning, or encouragement, or some particular instruction, as the case may be. In short, *God makes prayer, and the answers to it, or refusals of it, one of his great instruments of moral discipline.*

II. Secondly; answers to prayer are *conditioned by the character of the petitioner.* Several conditions of this kind are expressly mentioned in Holy Scripture, and, where they are not mentioned, they are implied, and must be understood. Thus (as has been pointed out in the preceding Chapter) prayer must be persevering, it must be the outcome of intense earnestness, if it is to be successful—not an asking only, but a seeking, not a seeking only, but a knocking, in the spirit of him who said, "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."⁴ Then again; a belief in the efficacy of our prayer is by the words of Christ and his apostle James made essential to success; "What things soever ye desire, when ye pray, believe

¹ Psalm cvi. 15, P.B.V.

³ See Hos. xiii. 11.

² See 1 Sam. viii. 5, 19.

⁴ Gen. xxxii. 26.

that ye receive *them*, and ye shall have *them* ;”¹
 “ Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.”² Then,
 again ; when we “ stand praying,” we are bidden, as
 another condition of a favourable issue, to “ forgive,
 if we have ought against any ; that our Father also
 which is in heaven may forgive us our trespasses ;”³
 no prayers will be answered but those which are
 offered in a spirit of love. But the one condi-
 tion in the character of the petitioner which em-
 braces every other, is that already quoted ; “ If ye
 abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall
 ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.”⁴
 The more the believer lives in the atmosphere of
 communion with Christ, and the more the words of
 Christ,—his precepts and promises,—exert a real
 living influence over his character and conduct, so
 much the more power does he acquire of commanding
 at the throne of grace just what he wills. And if
 the communion between his mind and that of his
 Master were absolutely perfect, as it never can be in
 this state of existence, then the whole of God’s
 treasury would lie open to him, and whatever he
 might reach out his hand for should be his. It is
 because we are so often out of harmony with God’s
 own mind, when we approach his throne of grace, that
 our prayers are such utter failures—fetch down no-
 thing at all. Such failure is no falsification whatever
 of any divine promise, when the promise is understood
 rightly, and in connexion with those other passages
 of Holy Scripture which impose limitations upon it.

III. But, thirdly, answers to prayer are con-

¹ St. Mark xi. 24.

³ See St. Mark xi. 25.

² James i. 6.

⁴ St. John xv. 7.

ditioned by *the nature of the thing prayed for*. "That we may obtain our petitions, make us to ask such things as shall please thee."¹ "Grant that those things, which we have faithfully asked *according to thy will*, may effectually be obtained."² "With strong crying and tears"³ our Lord besought his Father in the garden that the cup might pass from Him, if it were possible that it should do so, consistently with the great purpose for which He came into this world, the salvation of man and the glory of God. But He added a qualification to the prayer, "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou *wilt*."⁴ It was a great lesson to all his disciples for all time, and one which should have an abiding place in our hearts, that in laying our innocent desires before God, as we are bidden and encouraged to do, we should carefully subordinate our wills to his, and ask for what we have set our hearts upon, subject to what He sees in his fatherly wisdom and love to be expedient, not for ourselves only, but for all those for whom, in his government of the world, He has to consult.

Nor must this condition, "if it be according to Thy will," qualify only our petitions for earthly and temporal good things. Often when our prayers are dictated by a high spiritual ambition, we know not how much of heart-cutting sorrow,—such as we might not be at present able to endure, and which our heavenly Father would gladly spare us, till we are better fitted for it,—might be involved in the granting of them. St. James and St. John desired

¹ Collect for the Tenth Sunday after Trinity.

² Sixth Collect at the end of the Communion Service.

³ See Heb. v. 7.

⁴ See St. Matt. xxvi. 39.

to sit one on the right hand of our Lord, and the other on the left, in his kingdom. It was a grand and sublime aspiration; but they were told that they knew not what they asked; there was an ordeal to be passed through by all who would attain the eminence they coveted—a baptism of blood to be baptized with, and a cup of suffering to be drunk to the dregs.¹ In their lofty glow of enthusiasm, were they prepared for this? “Thy will be done” is more, much more, than one out of several petitions of the Lord’s Prayer. It is the undertone of all the petitions, which should be heard audibly in each. It must be a keynote running through the whole strain of prayer, and characterizing it throughout.

It is not difficult to see how Solomon’s petition for wisdom complies with the main conditions of successful prayer. As regards *God’s Providence and the exercise of his moral government*, it is easy to understand that some extraordinary qualifications of this young prince for the office of king might be necessary for the stability of David’s throne, the foundations of which, it is clear from the history, had been unsettled by the infirmities, moral and physical, of David’s latter days. And can it be doubted that to thousands of persons, placed by Providence in arduous and responsible positions, the record of Solomon’s choice, and of the abundant success with which his petition was crowned, has been the greatest possible encouragement and comfort, and has led them to the one “fountain of all wisdom,”² whose sup-

¹ See St. Matt. xx. 20, 21, 22.

² See the Fifth Collect at the end of the Communion Service.

plies are exhaustless, however many the channels into which it is derived? The narrative of it seems to haunt the memory of St. James, when, speaking by the Spirit of God, he gives that great promise of wisdom for the times of the New Testament; "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him."¹ As if he would say; "The grant to Solomon is not a bygone incident of the past, with which we have now no concern. God will be equally munificent nowadays to all who feel their need of wisdom to qualify them for their duties, and who apply to Him for it, in full confidence of his willingness to bestow it on them."—Then, *as to the character of the petitioner*,—that Solomon should have eschewed all the objects of worldly ambition in comparison of *that* wisdom, which could qualify him for the *performance* of his duties, is itself a convincing *evidence* of the right principles and high aims of his youth.—And *as to the things asked*,—we are expressly told that Solomon's prayer "pleased the Lord." How could it fail to do so, being simply a petition for grace "to do his duty in that state of life, unto which it had pleased God to call him"?

Let us conclude this rapid summary of the conditions of successful prayer by glancing at the utter impossibility of ascertaining the results of prayer by any test, which it is possible for man to apply. Not long ago certain sceptical men of science attempted to do the devil's work of discouraging

¹ James i. 5.

prayer, by throwing out a sort of challenge to religious people in the form of a prayer-test. "If you allege that God hears prayer, and specially united prayer, combine all of you to ask Him by a certain day to restore all the sick people in a certain hospital to perfect health, and see what will be the result." The inference from a failure was to be, either that there was no God, or that He is not a God who hears and answers prayer. Enough, surely, has been said to show the exceeding folly and futility of this argument, and how very little the persons presuming to advance it can have understood of the subject they were talking about. The Holy Scriptures make certain conditions essential to the success of prayer; but they are conditions of such a nature that no one but He who has insight into the heart, and foresight into the future, can possibly ascertain whether they have been complied with. A man sets his heart on the recovery of a sick person, and resolves to pray earnestly for it. Will that person's recovery be good (in the highest sense) for himself and others connected with him? will it be for God's glory in the long run that he should recover? Is the petitioner's heart right with God? Perhaps he has idolized his sick friend, and his prayer in effect is, that his idol may not be broken. Is he in charity with all men? Is he praying in faith, or in a spirit of doubt and scepticism, as if he would put God to the proof, and say to Him, "Let me see that you are true to your promises, by doing this, or that, or the other"? These and similar questions must be answered satisfactorily, before we have any warrant, either in Scripture, or in the experience of thoughtful and devout

Christians, to expect that the suit will be successful. And who *can* answer such questions, but God Himself? Evidently they are quite beyond his creatures.

Reader, never for an instant allow the scoffing of the scientific sceptic (who shows as much folly in his lucubrations upon religious subjects as a theologian might show on questions of science), or the foolish fanaticism of a few raw students of the Bible, who run away with wild impressions from single texts, to shake your earnest, steadfast persuasion in the efficacy of prayer. Such a persuasion is the sheet-anchor of piety in the Christian mind. Let the sheet-anchor fail to hold, and you know not whither your vessel may drift. And that it may not fail to hold, that it may never shift, determine to know the power of prayer in your own experience. Let the answer to it be no mere matter of hearsay, but "what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked upon, and our hands have handled."¹

There is an irresistible attractiveness in the conception of a God who hears and answers prayer in the exercise of fatherly wisdom and love; as it is written, "O thou that hearest prayer, unto thee shall all flesh come."² Resist not this attraction. Go to the God who heareth prayer, in faith, in love, in entire submission to his wisdom and will. And you shall assuredly carry away, if not what you ask for, yet an influx of peace, and joy, and hope, into the heart, which shall give you a conviction, such as no cavils of scepticism shall be able to shake, that you have indeed been heard,—that "your labour has not been in vain in the Lord."

¹ See 1 John i. 1.

² Psalm lxxv. 2.

SUPPLEMENTAL

HELPS TOWARDS THE SOLUTION OF FOUR UNSETTLING QUESTIONS

IN one of our Collects, which, like all of them, expresses deep thought in the fewest possible words, we pray that God would "grant to his faithful people pardon and peace" (no mere alliteration this; there is a profound connexion between the things indicated by the two words: peace flows from a sense of pardon; the consciousness of having received pardon *is* peace), "that they may be cleansed from all their sins, and serve Him with a quiet mind."¹ There is no possibility of serving Him acceptably without "a quiet mind,"—without a conscience quieted, as regards past charges, by belief in the sovereign efficacy of Christ's blood, and quieted also, as regards present duties, by the feeling that we are discharging them to the best of our power. Any doubt upon this last point is unsettling and disturbing to the mind,—breaks "peace" effectually, and by doing so obstructs our progress in the spiritual life. Accordingly, in these Supplemental Chapters an attempt is made to deal with four questions which often disturb the peace of those who are bent on serving God, and to give some help towards their solution. The first concerns ourselves, and our

¹ Collect for the Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity.

guidance in the perplexities which meet us in daily life. The next two are questions which have to do with "my duty towards my neighbour." How shall I maintain both courtesy and sincerity in my intercourse with him ; and, again, how shall I bring my personal dislikes "into captivity to the obedience of Christ?" The last has reference to "my duty towards God";—am I satisfying his claims upon me in regard to what I possess? The writer trusts that what is here offered to the reader on these subjects may be found generally helpful in the way of marking out principles, even if, amid the numberless contingencies of life, cases should still arise in which the application of the principles may seem to be doubtful. In such cases, the only recommendation which can be given would seem to be ; "Act, after prayer, to the best of your judgment."

CHAPTER I

OF SEEKING GOD'S GUIDANCE IN PERPLEXITIES.

And David knew that Saul secretly practised mischief against him; and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring hither the ephod. Then said David, O Lord God of Israel, thy servant hath certainly heard that Saul seeketh to come to Keilah, to destroy the city for my sake. Will the men of Keilah deliver me up into his hand? Will Saul come down, as thy servant hath heard? O Lord God of Israel, I beseech thee, tell thy servant. And the Lord said, He will come down. Then said David, Will the men of Keilah deliver me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the Lord said, They will deliver thee up. Then David and his men, which were about six hundred, arose and departed out of Keilah, and went whithersoever they could go. And it was told Saul that David was escaped from Keilah, and he forbore to go forth.—1 SAM. xxiii. 9 to 13.

AMONG the "divers manners" in which "God spake in time past unto the fathers,"¹ before all other and lower forms of Revelation were merged and superseded in the grand culminating revelation made by his Son, there was one called Urim and Thummim. While the exact method in which this revelation was made is obscure, the form which it took,—that of guidance by the mouth of the high priest,—was the simplest of all simple things,—so much so, that

¹ See Heb. i. 1, 2.

in certain phases of feeling one might almost look back with a sigh, and regret that such a direct and explicit means of communication with God should no longer exist. The Urim and Thummim (lights and perfections, for such is the meaning of the two Hebrew words) were certain things (we are not told what, and therefore it is bootless and presumptuous to inquire) which were put into the jewelled breast-plate of the high priest,¹ the breast-plate being attached to the ephod or sacerdotal robe,² in virtue of which he was enabled,—we know not by what particular use of the Urim and Thummim,—to prophesy, to give to God's people directions from Him as to how they should act in the difficulties and perplexities which they referred to Him. This method of consulting God was not open to the people in their private concerns ; but in all matters of public importance it was the privilege, nay the duty, of the person at the head of affairs, to consult the Divine Oracle lodged with the high priest, and to act under his instructions. I say it was his duty ; and the neglect of it entailed serious consequences. It was because Joshua and the princes of the congregation did not ask counsel at the mouth of the Lord that they fell into the trap, which the inhabitants of Gibeon laid for them, and had to endure for all future time the presence in their midst of a colony of the accursed Canaanites.³ Yes ; God having thrown open to his people this means of arriving at a solution of their national difficulties (as it had been said to Moses, " Joshua shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall ask *counsel*

¹ See Exod. xxviii. 15, 30.

² *Ibid.*, verse 28.

³ See Joshua ix. 3 to 22 ; particularly verse 14.

for him after the judgment of Urim before the LORD: at his word shall they go out, and at his word they shall come in, *both* he, and all the children of Israel with him " ¹), it was their bounden duty to avail themselves of it; and it was also their high privilege thus to obtain Divine direction in all doubtful cases, a privilege which was withdrawn when the persons seeking it, or on behalf of whom it was sought, were unworthy of it. In the passage which stands at the head of this Chapter we have an instance of David's making full use of the privilege, and promptly and directly eliciting a response. On the other hand, we read of Saul in his latter days, when the "evil spirit from the LORD" ² had taken full possession of him, that "when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets." ³ The literal Urim and Thummim, whatever may have been the instrument of Divine Revelation which went under this name, seems to have been very early lost, or rather superseded by the gift of simple prophecy, independent of any connexion with the sacerdotal breast-plate. We never read of its being resorted to after the times of Abiathar; and according to Jewish tradition, it was one of the things which existed under the first temple, but which was absent under the second. But though it was admitted to be absent, there seems to have been an expectation that it would be restored. On the return from captivity it was ruled by Zerubbabel that certain priests, the register of whose genealogy could not be found, and

¹ Num. xxvii. 21.

² See 1 Sam. xvi. 14.

³ 1 Sam. xxviii. 6.

as regards whom therefore a question might be raised as to whether they were priests, although reputed so, "that they should not eat of the most holy things" (that is, of such offerings as were by the law the portion of the priests) "till there stood *up* THE priest" (so it is in the Book of Nehemiah, though the parallel passage in the Book of Ezra does not exhibit the definite article before the word priest) "with Urim and Thummim."¹ Zerubbabel's anticipation

¹ Nehemiah vii. 65. See also Ezra ii. 63, which in the Hebrew is exactly the same with the verse in Nehemiah, with the exception (1) of leaving out the definite article before הַכֹּהֵן ("a priest," instead of "the priest"), and (2) of inserting the preposition before Thummim as well as before Urim ("with Urim and with Thummim," instead of, as in Nehemiah, "with Urim and Thummim").

Every word of Holy Scripture, which is "given by inspiration of God," is weighed, even its particles and conjunctions; and I find a special significance, as I have indicated above, in the prefix of the definite article to the word priest in Nehemiah vii. 65. But it is right to say that, as in other languages, so in Hebrew, the definite article is sometimes tantamount to the indefinite, one of its offices being, according to Professor Lee (*Grammar of the Hebrew Language*, ed. 3, art. 180, 14, p. 174) that of "impressing upon the mind of the hearer or reader the *peculiar property, nature, character*, etc. of the noun to which it is prefixed." The instance he gives is 1 Sam. xvii. 34, "There came a lion, and a bear" (literally, "the lion and the bear," הַלֵּוֹן וְהַדָּבָר) "and took a lamb out of the flock,"—"an animal remarkable for its properties as a lion," says the Professor, "a very bear." Similarly, in the idiom of the Greek Testament we have Ἐξῆλθεν ὁ σπερμαὶ τοῦ σπερμαῖ (literally, "the sower went forth to sow"—a person of that class, of that industry). And so in English oftentimes. We might say, "The economical housekeeper makes up his accounts once a week," without denoting any particular housekeeper—simply meaning that the class of economical housekeepers act in that way.

In the famous instance, "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son" (Isaiah vii. 14), where in the Hebrew it is "The virgin" (הַעַלְמָה), Professor Lee holds that the article "marks the noun to which it is prefixed as already *known* and *definite* . . . from general consent." Thus the force of it would be, "the predicted and expected Virgin—the woman whose seed, according to prophecy, is to bruise the serpent's head" (Gen. iii. 15). Very similar I apprehend its force to be in Neh. vii. 65; "the Priest after the order of Melchisedec who is looked for in pursuance of the words of Psalm cx. 4, and who of course will 'stand up with Urim and Thummim.'"

was fulfilled, nay, fulfilled in the most glorious possible manner, though not at all in the way which he probably anticipated. The literal Urim and Thummim, enfolded in the high priest's breast-plate, was never to be restored. The last vestige of it, if I may so say—the last exercise of the prophetic gift vested in the high priest, and once attached to the Urim and Thummim, was when Caiaphas, giving utterance, as far as his own intention was concerned, merely to a maxim of worldly policy, thus decided the strife of tongues in the Sanhedrim, to which the resuscitation of Lazarus had given rise ; “ Ye know nothing at all, nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he,” says the Evangelist, “ not of himself : but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation ; and not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.”¹ Thenceforth and thereafter there did stand up “ the priest with Urim and Thummim,” even our great “ high priest over the house of God,”² who is Himself the oracle of oracles, superseding and extinguishing all lesser oracles by which God speaks to man, and therefore called the Word, because just as a word expresses an idea in the mind of him who utters it, and is the means of throwing that idea into other minds, so Christ in his Person, in his life, and in his work, expresses the Infinite God—reveals Him in the most perfect way in which He is capable of being revealed to the finite mind of man, as it is said, “ The only begotten Son, which is in

¹ St. John xi. 49 to 53.

² See Heb. x. 21.

the bosom of the Father, he hath declared *him*,"¹ and again, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou *then*, Shew us the Father?"²

But it will be said that this full and perfect revelation of God, which it is admitted that our **great** High Priest has made, falls short of the solution of practical difficulties and perplexities, which was the great object of the gift of Urim and Thummim; and it may be asked whether there is nothing under the Covenant of Grace which corresponds to this gift, and indeed is its antitype and substance. Beyond all question there is; and it is nothing else than the Holy "Spirit of counsel," which our High Priest bestows on each individual soul of his people, when seeking guidance from Him in truth and heart's uprightness. The oracle is now given by the movement of the Spirit of Christ in the depth of the disciple's spirit,—it is an unseen transaction between him and his Lord, losing, however, none of its reality, nor of its point, by being unseen. And it should be remarked that, whereas the oracle by Urim and Thummim was only available for the direction of God's people in affairs of moment, and was usually to be resorted to only by the heads of the nation, or by some one who had for the time being a claim to represent it,³ the Spirit of counsel, by which our High Priest now gives answers in solution of his people's

¹ St. John i. 18.

² St. John xiv. 9.

³ "First, they" [the Jewish doctors] "say that only the *King*, or else the *Father of the Consistory* [*Abbeth Din*] had power to consult, or to propose the matter unto the *Priest*, and the *Priest* only had power to resolve. Secondly, that the matter proposed must not be trivial, but of moment and great difficulty." Godwyn's *Moses and Aaron*, Book iv. Chap. viii. p. 167. [London, 1655.]

"And they enquired not hereby, for a common man: but either for

perplexities, is for all alike, the lowest as well as the highest, and available for single individuals in those perplexities of private life, which seem to concern none but themselves. The promise fulfilled at Pentecost runs thus ; "I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams : and on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour it in those days of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy,"¹—under the Dispensation of the Spirit, no age, no sex, no condition of life, however humble, was to be precluded from the enjoyment of the Spirit's influences,—the mystical oil poured in such abundance upon our Aaron's head not only running down upon his beard, but going down also to the very skirts of his garments.² It is indeed quite possible, as I hinted at the beginning of the Chapter, that some persons, notwithstanding all the admitted advantages of spiritual counsel given to every perplexed disciple in the depth of the heart, may still look lovingly and regretfully back to the simplicity of those ancient times, when God might be consulted by his truer-hearted servants like David in the way of audible question, and receive through the priest an audible, prompt, and unmistakeable answer,—an answer not like that of heathen oracles, which too often were equivocal,

" That paltered with men in a double sense,
That kept the word of promise to the ear,
And broke it to the hope,"³—

the King, or for him on whom the affairs of the congregation lay." Maimonides, as quoted by Ainsworth (*Upon the Five Bookes of Moses*) on Exod. xxviii. 30. ¹ Acts ii. 17, 18. ² See Psalm cxxxiii. 2.

³ See Macbeth Act. v. Scene viii. 20, 21, 22.

but perfectly plain and pertinent, and leaving no doubt as to what was meant. I am not prepared to say that this feeling is wholly wrong, any more than I should be prepared to condemn those sentimental regrets for the ways and habits of childhood, in which I suppose all of us have occasionally indulged. Time was when our parents were to us the impersonation of everything that is good, and wise, and sympathetic, when their will was our law, their opinions the model on which we framed our own, and when we felt that so long as we consulted them, and did what they advised us, we could not go wrong. For the period of childhood such sentiments are appropriate and becoming ; nay, there is a beauty and loveliness in them in their season ; and, as the memories of our past are naturally attractive to all of us, we look back upon them with interest, and with a certain affectionate yearning,—a certain regret that the condition of things, of which these sentiments were a part, is irrevocably over,—gone beyond recall. Nevertheless we have as a fact outgrown them ; faith in the absolute wisdom and goodness of our earthly parents, and in their power to do for us all we need, such as very young children are apt to harbour, such faith is indeed gone beyond recall ; and if only we have transferred these sentiments to our Father which is in heaven, who in his power, wisdom, and love offers a perfectly satisfying object for them, we are surely not the losers, but very much the gainers, by the exchange. So also with those ancient, primitive, bygone methods of communicating with God, and ascertaining his will in cases of doubt and difficulty. From their having been externally transacted, they

may seem to us more real, and there is no doubt a certain old-world picturesqueness about them ; but to us is vouchsafed a communication with heaven so much more prompt and rapid, an access to God involving relations so much more close and intimate, that to go back to Urim and Thummim would be to go back to the childhood of the human race, as if a full-grown man and woman should refuse to think for themselves, and to exercise their own judgment in matters of daily life, and should still refer all their difficulties to their parents, now possibly become by age decrepit and effete. But it still remains to offer some direct practical helps to Christians who are beset with perplexities in daily life, and whose desire is that God should indicate to them his will as to how they should act in their perplexity,—as to what He would have them to do.

1. First : let such persons remember that a promise is vouchsafed to them; specially applicable to their circumstances, in which the guidance they are in search of is assured to them ; “ I will inform thee, and teach thee in the way wherein thou shalt go : and I will guide thee with mine eye.”¹ But it is immediately followed by a warning as to the possibility of men's not being tractable to such guidance ; “ Be ye not like to horse and mule, which have no understanding.”² And in another Psalm, also attributed to David, the Holy Spirit dictates for the perplexed a prayer, which they may use under such circumstances ; “ Shew thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto thee.”³

¹ Psalm xxxii. 9. P.B.V.

² *Ibid.*, verse 10.

³ Psalm cxliii. 8. P.B.V.

But in a subsequent verse we are instructed that the thing which we should seek to do is not what pleases ourselves, but what pleases God ; " Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth thee, for thou art my God." ¹ Pregnant warnings these, that if we would be guided by God's eye, we must be cordially willing to follow any indications which it may make to us,—that, if we would have Him show us our way, we must be prepared, when He does show it, to walk in it, in whatever direction it may lead us. We all know how often we seek advice of one another without any serious intention of taking it, unless it falls in with our own views. It would be wrong, I think, to call such asking for advice hypocritical ; yet on the other hand it can hardly be called perfectly sincere. What it means in plain language is this. I have a high esteem for my friend A. B. ; he has had much experience of human life and character ; and his judgment is generally admitted to be good. In this matter, on which I am seeking to make up my mind, and which perhaps may affect my whole future career very materially, I am conscious that I have a leaning to one course rather than another ; and what I really want of A. B. is that he should give me advice in favour of that course, so that I may have his opinion to second and fortify me in adopting it. So entirely is this what I want of him, that I might even feel annoyed with him, if he were to counsel me on the side opposed to my own wishes. Ah ! this is not the spirit in which " the High Priest with Urim and Thummim " is to be consulted if an oracular answer is desired from Him, if we desire that " a word "

¹ Psalm cxliii, 10. P.B.V.

should be heard within us, saying, "This is the way," my child, "walk thou in it, when thou turnest to the right hand, and when thou turnest to the left."¹ We may have,—nay, we may not be able to help having,—our wishes and prepossessions ; but the will (oh, hard task !) must not be warped by them ; it must swing perfectly loose on its pivot, if it would feel, and move in obedience to, the magnetism of the Lord's will. "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"² said Saul prostrate on the ground before the Divine Master, when at length his will had been wholly brought round to conformity with God's will, and he no longer kicked against the goads which the Good Shepherd had been applying to the recalcitrant ox,—when, in short, the prostration of his body was only "an outward and visible sign" of the entire, absolute, uncompromising submission to which, by Divine discipline, his soul had been brought round ;—"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" As if he had said ; "Only indicate thy will to me, dear Lord, and I am ready to do it ; send me whither it pleases Thee to send me, and I will go ; lay upon me what burden Thou seest fit, and the love and the wisdom which imposes the burden will qualify me to bear it aright." It is in this spirit that our High Priest must be sought, when an oracle for guidance is desired from Him. If wishes cannot be entirely suppressed, there must be at least a clear and firm resolve of the will to embrace and adopt God's will without hesitation, on the instant of its being made known to us, and a full persuasion that the course He indicates is conducive, if not to our

¹ See Isaiah xxx. 21.

² Acts ix. 6.

present likings, yet to our truest good and highest welfare.

2. The next point is, that while we pray—earnestly, fervently, incessantly—for guidance, thus recognising that such guidance is God's to give and to withhold, we should, on the other hand, constantly bear in mind that God has been pleased to endow us with reason, judgment, foresight,—has in short given us natural faculties for the determination of our course in life, and that He will guide and counsel us, not independently of, but through these natural faculties. In virtue of their possessing a moral nature, men are turned about, and their actions determined, not like horse and mule, by the outward constraint of bit and bridle, but by the rational influence exercised by motives on the will. I know not where I have seen the maxim, nor who first propounded it, but I believe that it contains the very quintessence of wisdom on this subject of the Christian's guidance in his difficulties ;—"A man seldom or never regrets that step which he has taken, after first praying well over the question, and then acting according to the best of his judgment." It is a maxim which fences off self-direction and self-guidance on the one hand, and fanaticism on the other. First ; we never regret the step, over which we have well prayed, before we took it. If it is simple and sincere prayer, not warped by prepossessions of the will ; if it is indeed prayer that God would show us what He would have us to do, not confirm us in what we desire to do, then it is a true acknowledgment that the guidance must come from Him, although through our own faculties, that our faculties of themselves have it not in them to furnish

what we need, that they are but an *Æolian* harp, which can give no sound at all, unless the breath of heaven play over its chords,—a *Memnon's* statue, which may have all the musical apparatus within, but can make no melody, except when the sun's rays strike upon it. But, again, we never regret the step which we have taken according to the best of our judgment (assuming that the judgment has been purified, exalted, cleared, by prayer). The guidance under which the Christian acts is no whim or fancy, no dream of a disordered brain, no mere internal prompting, which can give no other account of itself than that it is an internal prompting ;—it can give a reason of the hope that is in it, of the faith that is in it,—the faith, namely, that the prompting is of God ;—can allege grounds which approve themselves to reason as to why this course has more to be said in its favour than its alternative.

It may be thought that, in what has hitherto been said on the subject of Divine guidance in our perplexities, the cases mainly contemplated have been grave ones, of much importance to the individual, and also cases, which, from the circumstances of them, give time for mature consideration,—do not demand that a man should act almost on the spur of the moment. What is to be done, it may be asked, when such cases as these latter occur, as they do frequently in the daily life of those who are mixed up in affairs? An unforeseen emergency or conjunction of circumstances opens a question which is evidently of some importance, and yet which demands a more or less immediate settlement. Well ; the Providence of God having sent the emergency, his

wisdom, if thou turn to Him mentally, will enable thee to meet it right. Recollect thyself, so far as at least to recall the promise by St. James ; " If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all *men* liberally, and upbraideth not ; and it shall be given him."¹ God loves to be asked for wisdom and guidance by those who have to deal with intricate and difficult affairs. He showed this to be his mind, by the immediate and superabundantly liberal response which He made to Solomon's prayer for wisdom. Let Solomon's prayer in his grave difficulties be thine in thy humble one ; "Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart. . . . that I may discern between good and bad."² And, seeing thou hast God's own warrant and note of hand for expecting an answer, doubt not that the answer will come. It shall be with thy prayer as with Solomon's ; "The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing."³ And the token of its pleasing Him will be its being answered ; "Behold I have done according to thy words."⁴ The step taken after prayer, and to the best of thy judgment, shall leave no regret behind.

¹ James i. 5.³ *Ibid.*, verse 10.² 1 Kings iii. 9.⁴ *Ibid.*, verse 12.

CHAPTER II

OF THE RECONCILIATION OF COURTESY AND SINCERITY

Speaking the truth in love.—EPH. iv. 15.

MANY will be found to regret (among them, perhaps, some of the eminent scholars who made the change) that, in obedience to the inexorable law of accepting that reading of the original, which has in its favour the best manuscripts and the best critical editions, the precept "*Be courteous*"¹ has vanished from the New Testament,—is not to be found in the Revised Version; the closely allied grace of humility having taken the place of courtesy, and the English text now running; "*Be ye all. . . . humbleminded.*"² Perhaps, however, it may console us to observe that in another passage, and one which throws some light upon the nature of true courtesy, which the precept in St. Peter did not, they have retained the word "*courteous*," or rather its cognate adverb "*courteously*." When the ship, which was carrying St. Paul with the

¹ 1 Pet. iii. 8.

² The best Manuscripts and critical Editions all agree in giving *ταπεινόφρονες*, humble minded, instead of *φιλόφρονες*, kindly minded, friendly, courteous. Even the late Bishop Christopher Wordsworth, by no means prone to admit variations from the Revised Text, gives *ταπεινόφρονες* in his Greek Testament.

tidings of the Gospel to Rome, the world's metropolis, was wrecked on the island of Melita, the crew, every soul of which escaped, sorely needed the kind offices of their brother men. They received these kind offices, both from the islanders and from the Roman magistrate posted there at the Government House. The barbarous people (not barbarous people in the sense of uncivilised, but simply as being neither Greeks nor Romans—probably of African extraction) treated them most humanely, “kindling a fire, and receiving them every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.”¹ And as for the magistrate, Publius, he having learned, no doubt, from the centurion in charge of the prisoners, and also from the incident of the Apostle's having shaken off the viper, which would be reported to him with no diminution of its marvellousness, that St. Paul was a very remarkable person, received him and his companion St. Luke, who records the circumstance, into his house, and “lodged us,” it is said, “three days courteously.”² Now to give hospitality for three days is something more than courteous in the sense which the world attaches to the word. By courtesy in the world's sense is meant an outside veneer residing in the manners, and which has not necessarily anything corresponding to it in the mind,—a compliance with those social forms, which it is indeed most desirable to maintain, but which, as used by a

¹ See Acts xxviii. 2.

² Acts xxviii. 7. *τρεῖς ἡμέρας φιλοφρόνως ἐξένισεν*. Once again, in connexion with St. Paul's voyage in the “ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy,” (Acts xxvii. 3) is the adverb “courteously” used in the Authorised Version. “Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave *him* liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself;” but here it is the translation of *φιλανθρώπως*, kindly, *humanely*.

large majority of people, do not represent any sentiment underlying the forms. But this by itself is not true courtesy,—not the courtesy which Holy Scripture recommends, but only the outward visible sign of it. To receive perfect strangers into your house, men of totally different habits and ways of thought from yourself, and who are recommended to you chiefly by the circumstance that they have suffered from the fury of the winds and the waves, this is something more than the world's courtesy,—it is kindness, friendliness, showing itself in kind and friendly actions,—in short, it is a form of love.¹ And in this way we are to understand the courtesy recommended to us, and of which illustrations are given to us, in Holy Scripture. Among the forms of social courtesy is the practice of sending kind remembrances, regards, and so forth, to absent persons, by letter or by word of mouth. That God would have us maintain such forms may be gathered with certainty from the fact that nearly one whole Chapter of the New Testament, the sixteenth of the Epistle to the

¹ In Shakespere, too, who was contemporary with the Authorised Version, we find the word "courtesy" used to denote substantial kindness. Thus in *The Taming of the Shrew* (Act iv. Scene 2) Tranio, having told the pedant that by coming from Mantua to Padua, in defiance of the Paduan duke's decrees, he had risked his life, then says to him—

"To save your life in this extremity,
This favour will I do for you for his" [my father Vincentio's] "sake ;
And think it not the worst of all your fortunes
That you are like to Sir Vincentio.
His name and credit shall you undertake,
And in my house you shall be friendly lodged.

If this be *courtesy*, sir, accept of it."

Here, just as in the Authorised Version of the Acts of the Apostles, the word "courtesy" is used to denote an act of hospitality and very substantial kindness.

Romans, is occupied with salutations (either from St. Paul himself, or from those who commissioned him, as he was writing, to remember them to his correspondents) of persons, of whom we know nothing but the names. We cannot for a moment suppose that these salutations, admitted as they are into the Word of God, and consecrated by that admission, meant nothing on St. Paul's pen or in the mouth of those who sent them, as too often similar words mean nothing on our pen and in our mouth. Glance over the Chapter, and you will see continually peeping out the real interest in the people named, which gives life and reality to the greeting. "Greet Priscilla and Aquila: they have for my life laid down their own necks; I and all the Gentile Churches have a debt to them which can never be repaid;"¹ "The beloved Persis laboured much in the Lord,—commend me to her,"² "Rufus's mother" (perhaps the widow of Simon the Cyrenian, who helped the Lord along with his Cross³) "showed herself a mother to me too—pray greet both her and her son from me;"⁴ "Herodion is my relative; do not forget to remember me very kindly to him;"⁵ "Andronicus and Junia shared my captivity, and are knit to me by the remembrance of common hardships endured for the sake of the common Lord; assure them how mindful I am of them."⁶ "Timothy, so associated with me in my labours, and Gaius, who allows our congregations to meet in his house, tell me I must not close up my letter without sending their best remembrances,"⁷—these and the like touches, of

¹ See Rom. xvi. 3, 4.² Verse 12.³ See St. Mark xv. 21.⁴ See Rom. xvi. 13.⁵ Verse 11.⁶ Verse 7.⁷ Verses 21, 23.

which there are several, show that these salutations, even where they record nothing respecting the persons saluted, are no vapid courtesies,—that underlying every one of them there was this sentiment at least in the Apostle's mind, "So and so will be pleased by being remembered, pained by being left out." How glorified is that string of names by the loving interest in each individual, which prompted the mention of him or her by the inspired Apostle!

"Speaking the truth in love,"—to be perfectly sincere and perfectly kind,—so to conduct ourselves in our intercourse with others as to compromise neither truth on the one hand nor love on the other,—what a difficult problem! I might almost call it the problem of problems in that part of the spiritual life which has to do with our behaviour in society. Withdraw either of the virtues which has to be aimed at, and the difficulty ceases. On the one hand, it is only too easy to flatter, that is, to seek to give pleasure to a person by saying what is not true. This sacrifice of truth to love is a far more serious fault than at first might be imagined. Only call to mind the recorded effect of flattery upon the Herod of the Acts of the Apostles. One might think lightly, perhaps, of a piece of fulsome adulation offered to princes; good men and good Christians have sometimes been chargeable with this weakness; I am not sure that even the translators of the Authorised Version of the Bible have in their dedication steered altogether clear of such a charge; but if we wish to estimate the real virus of a departure from truth in this direction, we should look at it in the light of that narrative. The shout of the people, carried

away probably by the king's eloquence into an absurd and profane exaggeration, "*It is* the voice of a god, and not of a man," so pampered the natural vanity in Herod's heart, that he arrogated to himself the credit of his eloquence, and drew down an immediate and most awful judgment :—"Immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory : and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost."¹ A pregnant proof indeed that in flattery there is no real love, though there may be a desire to please ; for "love," we are told, "worketh no ill to his neighbour" ; and here is flattery working ill,—nay, working ruin both of body and soul.—On the other hand, it is easy to sacrifice love to truth ; there are many who do so, and who, in doing so, not unfrequently take credit to themselves for their sturdy outspokenness. There are those, who by a certain perverse instinct always touch the sore point in their intercourse with others, and heed very little how much pain they give, alleging sometimes as an apology that, for their part, they always say their minds, as freely before the face of their neighbour as behind his back. While it must be admitted, I think, that this sacrifice of love to truth is by no means so mischievous as the sacrifice of truth to love (if, indeed, the mere desire to please can be called love), and while the habit is likely to be rare, because it carries with it its own punishment of unpopularity, it is yet very far indeed from the ideal of a true Christian's intercourse with his neighbours, which not only has a certain relish of genuineness and sincerity about it, but is sweetened by consider-

¹ Acts xii. 21, 22, 23.

ateness for other people, and loving graciousness towards them, by a desire to avoid giving them pain, and (so far as it can be done consistently with truth) to gratify them. Probably a theoretical adjustment of the claims of love and truth in our intercourse with others, such as could be practically and readily applied to any of the great variety of circumstances which might arise, would be impracticable. So it is with several theoretical adjustments bearing upon the spiritual life,—that, for instance, which is continually confronting every thinking Christian, the adjustment of freewill and grace ; but what may always be done in these cases, and what it is always helpful to do, is to mark out clearly and firmly the two apparently opposite truths which have to be maintained, or opposite virtues which have to be cultivated, believing that he who holds both before him, under the guidance and discipline of the Spirit of God, will be led to discern the right course in each particular case as it arises. The solution of the famous old logical puzzle about the race between Achilles and the tortoise (as far as calculation goes, it seems that Achilles would never overtake the tortoise ; but *solvitur ambulando*—let them walk it, and you will see that he will) has its lesson for many high truths and precepts of religion, which at first sight seem to lead in opposite directions. They are capable of a practical but not of a theoretical reconciliation.

As duties are apt to be much better understood by proposing an example of them, than by mere directions and instructions, I will, before offering one or two practical hints, call your attention to the illustration of the graces of courtesy and sincerity,

which is offered by the apologies of the Apostle Paul. When he was arraigned before Felix, the orator Tertullus, who had been brought down to conduct the impeachment, opens his speech with a compliment as false as it was fulsome, seeking in this way to conciliate the governor's favour; "Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, we accept *it* always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness,"¹—the real fact being that Felix was as bad a provincial governor as was ever set over a Roman province,² barbarous, extortionate, one who readily connived at brigandage and robbery, if only he was allowed a share in the spoil, one who procured the assassination of Jonathan the high priest simply on the ground that he had frequently admonished him to reform his government,³ and whose corrupt administration had made him so detested by the provincials, that on his recall to Rome a formal complaint was lodged against him by the Jews, and would have been the means of bringing

¹ Acts xxiv. 2, 3.

² Tacitus, in mentioning the appointment of him by Claudius, sums up the character of his administration thus: "In a career marked by every kind of cruelty and lust he exercised the prerogative of a king with the temper of a slave" [*Hist.* v. 9.]

³ "Such continual admonitions," says Josephus [*Ant.* Book xx. Chap. 8, § 5], "are grievous to those who are disposed to act unjustly." Felix bribed an intimate friend of Jonathan's to procure his assassination by the *Sicarii*, who under the pretext of worshipping God went up to the temple with daggers concealed under their vestments,—thus setting a precedent, says Josephus, which they often repeated, when they wanted to rid themselves of any one who was obnoxious to them. It was this wicked profanation of the temple by the *Sicarii*, which, in the opinion of the Jewish historian, drew down upon his countrymen the destruction of the city by the Romans; "this seems to have been the reason why God, out of his hatred to these men's wickedness, rejected our city."

him to condign punishment, had not his brother Pallas, a man as profligate as himself, but a favourite at Court, interceded for him with Nero.¹ Not a word of praise has St. Paul for Felix as a provincial governor. Though his earthly fortunes were more or less in the hands of Felix, not for a moment would the Apostle have it thought that he concurred in the false panegyric of Felix's administration, which Tertullus had pronounced,—not even does he give to Felix in addressing him the official title of "most noble" belonging to his position, which he afterwards did give to Festus,² a judge whose administration was on the whole creditable and upright; but yet on the other hand he does say what he could with perfect truth say, by way of conciliating Felix, "Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself,"³—corrupt as a judge though Felix was, yet the Apostle felt it to be a real advantage to him that this judge had had some experience of Jewish habits and manners and ways of thought, and

¹ "Now, when Porcius Festus was sent as successor to Felix by Nero, the principal of the Jewish inhabitants at Cæsarea went up to Rome to accuse Felix; and he had certainly been brought to punishment, unless Nero had yielded to the importunate solicitations of his brother Pallas, who was at that time held in the greatest honour by him." [Josephus, *Ant.* xx. 8, § 9.] Pallas (a freedman of Claudius originally, like his brother) was a man of the most towering arrogance. He amassed enormous wealth, which at last excited the cupidity of Nero, who had him removed by poison.

² See Acts xxvi. 25, where he addresses Festus as Tertullus had addressed Felix (xxiv. 3), *Κράτιστε Φήστωρ*. St. Luke, in the introduction to his Gospel, addressed Theophilus as *κράτιστε* ("most excellent"), which indicates that Theophilus held some position to which this title attached. In the introduction to the Acts he drops the "most excellent," either, Bengel thinks, because Theophilus no longer held the position, or because St. Luke had grown more intimate with him.

³ Acts xxiv. 10.

genuinely feeling this to be so, he felt himself at liberty to say so. So much for St. Paul's *truthfulness* under trying circumstances. And as to *courtesy*, certainly in another and later apology,—that before Festus and Agrippa,—there is an exemplification of graceful and touching *courtesy*, such as, when all the circumstances of it are considered, I suppose was never yet outdone in the history of the world, nor ever will be. Paul, as being such an unimpeachable evidence of the truth of Christianity, was the innocent victim of the rancorous malice of the Jews, though perfectly guiltless, as he himself says, of the smallest offence against either the law, the temple, or Cæsar.¹ As in the case of the Divine Master before him,² so in his case the Roman governor was perfectly aware of his innocence, "very well knew" that to the Jews he had done no wrong.³ He had been in prison two full years when Festus came into the province,⁴ and had no doubt undergone prison hardships, such as might seem to excuse, if not to justify, a little burst of righteous indignation, when he was called forth from his prison cell, with no prospect of gaining his release, however ably he might defend himself (for had he not appealed to Cæsar? and to Cæsar it had been determined that he must go as soon as a convenient opportunity offered⁵); but simply to gratify the curiosity of King Agrippa and Bernice, who were paying a visit to the Roman governor. If he had refused under such circumstances to speak at all, and had determined to reserve what he had to say for the

¹ See Acts xxv. 8.

² See St. Matt. xxvii. 18; St. Mark xv. 10.

⁴ See Acts xxiv. 27.

³ See Acts xxv. 10.

⁵ Acts xxv. 10, 11, 12.

ears of Cæsar, to whom he had appealed, he would have been acting quite within his right, and no man could have blamed him ; but no ! he must be ready always, he *is* ready always, under whatever pressure of hardship and injustice, "to give a reason of the hope that is in him" ;¹ and being full of internal joy and peace, "the peace which passeth all understanding,"² and which flows from the realisation by faith of the Saviour's atoning work, his spirit is not in the least broken by his sufferings, and (oh ! marvel of Divine grace !) not in the least embittered. He would gladly make all men partakers of that joy and peace, which have established themselves in his own soul. Festus, Agrippa, Bernice, he would have all them to be like himself, excepting only in respect of those earthly privations which attended his present lot. And so, when he turns suddenly upon Agrippa, giving him credit for the convictions which he had already arrived at, and proposing to lead him on to higher and deeper convictions ; "King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets ? I know that thou believest" ;³ and when Agrippa declines to come to close quarters with such a question as the truth of Christianity without more mature consideration, "With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian,"⁴ then the gracious courtesy of the

¹ See 1 Pet. iii. 15.

² See Phil. iv. 7.

³ Acts xxvi. 27.

⁴ So the Revised Version of Acts xxvi. 28. And such is beyond all doubt the true rendering of the words, sorry as every one must be that the foundation of many admirable sermons on "The almost and altogether Christian" should be cut away—sermons not the less admirable, *nor the less true*, because the preacher had built his teaching upon a mistaken rendering of the Authorised Version. I subjoin the late Bishop Christopher Wordsworth's exposition of the precise force of Agrippa's words :—"Thou hast described *thine own* conversion. It was very rapid and sudden ; it was effected *ἐν ὀλίγῳ*, in a short time,—in a

Apostle, the very bloom and perfection, if I may so speak, of the Christian love that was in him, transpires with a special fragrance;—"I would to God that, whether with little" (persuasion) "or with much, not thou only, but also all that hear me this day, might become such as I am, except" (raising his manacled hands to the audience) "these bonds."

Such examples of the truth and courtesy exhibited under trying circumstances by our forefathers in the faith, set steadily before us as models for our imitation, may, under the blessing of God's Spirit, do much to help us. But one or two points of practical advice may be given, founded on what has been said.

1. While you strive to please in conversation, avoid flattery, chiefly, of course, on the ground of its untruthfulness, but also from the consideration of the mischief which may be done by it to him whom you aim at gratifying. Either it will distress and make him uncomfortable, if he is modest, or it will nourish his vanity, if he is vain.

2. It is certainly very observable that both St. Paul and St. Peter should, in commending to us love or charity, denote the love which they commend as

moment,—as it were with a word and a blow. It may be that *I also* should embrace Christianity; but such a great and important change requires much time and thought, especially for one like myself in high estate and royal dignity,—one who is a Jewish king and has the charge of the Temple. What a change would that be to *me*!—to me, the head of the royal house of the Herods, to become a Christian! You are hurrying me on too fast. You are attempting to do in a short time, and with little effort, what requires a long time and great consideration. You are endeavouring to do with *me* what you say was done with *you*. Hence the words are not *πειθεὶς με*, but *μὲ πειθεὶς*" (the "me" in the original is put before the verb "persuaded," to show that an emphasis is to be laid on it).

being "without hypocrisy." "*Let love be without dissimulation,*" says St. Paul ; that is, as the Revised Version gives it, "without hypocrisy."¹ And St. Peter in like manner speaks of "unfeigned love of the brethren"; again the same word, "love without hypocrisy."² This seems to be a clear indication that love is apt to be hollow,—apt to express itself in phrases and compliments, to which there is nothing corresponding in the sentiments and interests of the heart. The holy Apostles, speaking under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, would put us on our guard against this spurious kind of love. "Be what you seem to be. Do not express an interest in, and regard for, a person unless you feel it."

But then arises the question, Ought we not to feel some amount of interest in, and regard for, all men, even those whom we are casually thrown across ? Undoubtedly we ought ; and I suppose that, if we deliberately made respecting every such person the reflexion that this soul was created by God for no lower an end than communion with Himself by his Spirit, and redeemed by Him at no lower a price than the blood of his Son, and that it has capacities for future glory and blessedness, which may be unfolded under the discipline of Providence and Grace, and if, under this belief, we silently asked for an opportunity of helping and being of use to it, even where there are points of manner which repel us, we should in due time really gain the interest and friendly feeling

¹ Rom. xii. 9. Ἡ ἀγάπη, ἀνυπόκριτος.

² I Pet. i. 22. εἰς φιλαδελφίαν ἀνυπόκριτον. Here, however, the Revisers have retained the "unfeigned" love of the Authorised ; though the Greek word is the same as in Rom. xii. 9.

which a feigned or hypocritical love only affects. Then the difficulty is at an end. So far as we have a genuine friendly, neighbourly, brotherly feeling, we can express ourselves in friendly, neighbourly, brotherly words, without any compromise of truth.

3. And what is the true secret of a genuine feeling of goodwill towards all men? Surely it is the possession of the same frame of mind, which prompted St. Paul's utterance of gracious courtesy to King Agrippa. Men are not so thoroughly depraved but that, if they are in any respect happy themselves, they desire to communicate their happiness to others. Benevolence is, as Bishop Butler has shown, a real sentiment of the human heart,—really operative, although not nearly to such an extent as it might be, even in fallen human nature. If a man has got possession of the joy and peace flowing from a sense of pardon and acceptance with God, he will infallibly desire and endeavour (it is one of the evidences of the reality of the acquirement) to make others partake of the relief, the sunny brightness of mind, which the simple exercise of faith has brought into his own soul. It was most genuine, most real, that wish of St. Paul that Agrippa and all his audience should become what he himself was, always excepting the temporal hardships of his lot. There was as much truth as there was love in that beautiful burst of courtesy.

4. Finally, we should definitely set before us, when we go into society, the double aim of maintaining both truth and love, an aim which, so far as we are enabled to realise it,—will give a certain delicate gracefulness to our intercourse with others. I conclude with an interesting passage on this subject

from an essay on the "Custom of saying *Not at home*" (a practice which the author condemns and repudiates), by the late Rev. Henry Woodward, formerly rector of Fethard :—

"Blunt truth and blunt falsehood are at least agreed in one thing,—they are both straightforward ; they require no choice of terms, no suitableness of manner, no fitness of occasion. Every animal endued with speech can offend by truth, or flatter by a lie. But there is in intellectual things, as in corporeal substances, a line of beauty. And this, probably, derives its claim to preference from the same source in both : the curved or undulating line, or movement, bespeaking ease and softness ; not, as it were, advancing to its destined point with a directness which implies necessity, nor with a defiance of obstruction which implies resistance ; but (to exemplify what could not perhaps be otherwise described) flowing like a gentle river, which moves only where it can move with grace ; which yields to every obstacle, but which still pursues its course, deriving from impediments themselves at once its extended utility and characteristic beauty." ¹

¹ *Essays and Sermons*, by the Rev. Henry Woodward, A.M. In Two Volumes. Vol. I. pp. 228, 229. (Fourth edition. London : 1844.)

CHAPTER III

OUR DISLIKES

If there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

—ROM. xiii. 9.

WHAT shall we do about persons, whom we do not and cannot like? How shall we regulate our conduct, and still more our state of mind and heart, towards such persons? Is it right to dislike any one? Can such dislike be justified by the law of love, under which our Blessed Lord has so solemnly and so stringently laid us?¹ If not, give us some help and guidance in extirpating from our hearts, or at least in mortifying, that root of bitterness, which, while it remains, must tend to estrange us from God as well as man, and to shut us out from true and spiritual communion with our Saviour. The temptation to dislike certain people, be it observed, will be strong in proportion to the strength of our own character. There may possibly be those (I should suppose they are a minority) whose own character is so insipid that they have neither strong preferences nor strong aversions. I can fancy a languid and phlegmatic moral, just as I can fancy a languid

¹ See St. John xiii. 34; xv. 12, 17.

and phlegmatic physical, temperament ; but it will hardly be supposed by any thoughtful student of Holy Scripture that the insipidity, which makes the characters of those with whom we have to do indifferent to us, is the love which the Gospel recommends, or that it has any sort of affinity with that love. Most of God's saints under both the Old and New Dispensations have been men of an ardent type of character, repelling error and evil as fervently and energetically as they have advocated truth and righteousness. Was not David, the man after God's own heart, a man of such a type ? And the three great Apostles of Christ, St. Peter, St. Paul, and St. John, were they not all such ? Yes ; even St. John, who lay in the Divine Master's bosom and drank deep at the fountain of his love,—St. John, the key-note of whose Epistles is love, and whose sermons, when he was old and feeble, and had to be supported to the pulpit, were little else than echoes of the precept, " Little children, love one another,"—could he not and did he not thunder,—anathematize, if you will ? Yes ; by natural temperament he was a " son of thunder," one of the two Boanerges,¹ who sought to call down fire from heaven upon inhospitable Samaritans² refusing a welcome to his Divine Master. Nor was the same fiery zeal suppressed in him, but only regulated and chastened, by the influences of Pentecost. For thus he writes long years after Pentecost ; " If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine,"—the doctrine of the Incarnation of the Son of God,—" receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed :

¹ See St. Mark iii. 17.

² See St. Luke ix. 54.

for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.”¹ And it was he, if ecclesiastical tradition may be trusted, who fled out of the bath when Cerinthus was in it, because he would not be under the same roof with a teacher of deadly error, lest the roof should fall, and involve him in a common ruin with the heretic.² What a crushing condemnation of the spurious charity of our own times, which seems to consist in perfect indifference to religious error, even of the most serious type, and in freely allowing blasphemers of Christ and God to say what they like without even challenge or protest, not to speak of such censures as anathema or excommunication, which are altogether obsolete.

We will inquire, then, in the present Chapter how the precept of love to our neighbour, given indeed in the Law originally,³ but emphasized and illustrated by Christ and his Apostles, and made by them to comprehend every other commandment,⁴ is to be

¹ 2 John 10, 11.

² The tradition is given by Irenæus (*Contra Hæreses*, Lib. III. cap. iii.), and by him traced to Polycarp. “There are those who have heard him” (Polycarp) “say that John, the Lord’s disciple, going on one occasion to bathe at Ephesus, and catching sight of Cerinthus within, sprang out of the bath-house without bathing, but saying, ‘Let us flee, lest the bath-house should fall in, Cerinthus, the enemy of truth, being in it.’” Eusebius also (*Hist. Eccl.* Lib. III. cap. xxviii., Lib. IV. cap. xiv.) gives the story, but in both places entirely on the authority of Irenæus. Epiphanius tells the same story, not of Cerinthus, but of Ebion (*Contra Hæreses*, Lib. I. To. ii.), with the additional particulars that St. John, who never used the bath as a luxury, was moved by the Holy Spirit to go there for the sake of the censure which, in leaving it, he was to pronounce on Ebion. Epiphanius’s credulity and uncritical habit of mind are well known; and Irenæus’s version of the story is much the more likely to be the true one. Polycarp, from whose testimony to some contemporaries of Irenæus the latter intimates that he derived the narrative, had been a disciple of St. John, so that the tradition may be said to trace back to the age immediately succeeding that of the Apostle.

³ See Lev. xix. 18.

⁴ See St. Matt. vii. 12; Rom. xiii. 8, 9, 10; Gal. v. 14; 1 Tim. i. 5; James ii. 8.

understood. It is probable, I think, that in the minds of very many some confusion of thought hangs over its true meaning ; and that when this is cleared the precept may not appear to be so utterly out of our reach as not to be, through God's grace invoked into the soul by earnest prayer, quite practicable. What has been already advanced helps in a measure to clear up the meaning of the precept, or at least to clear away mistakes connected with it. The Apostle of love must be supposed himself to have fulfilled the precept of love, as far as any heir of sinful flesh and blood can do so. St. Stephen the protomartyr must be supposed to have fulfilled it in his dying hour, when he prayed for his murderers (after his Master's example), "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge."¹ Yet in St. John's case the loving his neighbour as himself was quite compatible with his feeling so strongly against deadly error as to warn the elect lady and her children to withhold hospitality, and the ordinary greetings and courtesies of society, from such false brethren as did not receive in its integrity the fundamental doctrine of the Incarnation. And in St. Stephen's case his prayer for his murderers was entirely compatible with his speaking to them in accents of fiery indignation against their perverseness ; "Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost : as your fathers *did*, so *do* ye."² This severe language was only the echo of that which the Master had used, who not only prayed but died for his murderers ; " *Ye* serpents, *ye* generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of

¹ Acts vii. 60.² Acts vii. 51.

hell?"¹ The truest and most sincere Christian love, then, by no means excludes (rather, I would say, it is another side of) indignation against evil and error, and indignant denunciation of those who hold perversely by evil and error. The principle of this compatibility between what seem at first sight to be natural opposites,—love and wrath,—will appear as we proceed.

My next observation is, that the precept to love our neighbour as ourselves cannot reasonably or Scripturally be understood to exclude a love of preference for some persons above others,—it cannot be thought to be equivalent to, "Thou shalt love all men alike and equally, *as regards their natural character.*" I say, as regards their natural character, because undoubtedly there is a sense in which all men *are* to be loved equally. When we rise out of the circle of actual human life, as it daily presents itself to each one of us, to consider men and women in their spiritual relation to God and Christ, and to ourselves as the work of God's hands, and the purchase of Christ's blood, we see that all are precisely on the same level. All souls equally, not one more than another, were created by God with an exquisite skill for no lower an end than the enjoyment of communion with Him by his Spirit. All souls equally, not one more than another, were redeemed by the most "precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."² All souls equally, not one more than another, are capable of sanctification by God's Spirit and renewal in his image. In these high spiritual regards it is impossible to draw a dis-

¹ St. Matt. xxiii. 33.

² See I Pet. i. 18, 19.

inction between man and man ; and therefore in this point of view,—banishing the immediate surroundings of human life, and looking above and beyond them to the spiritual relations of men, we are no doubt bound to an equal regard for all. But this equal regard for all, in a certain point of view, is quite compatible with preferences, in our walk through life, for some characters above others. That this is so is abundantly clear from what has been put upon record respecting our great Example. The Lord Jesus, though He lived his life of perfect obedience and shed his blood for us *all*, yet, because He would be made like unto us in all things, sin only except, and because preferences and attractions to some characters rather than others are, quite apart from the sin that is in us, inherent in the constitution of the human mind, condescended to have a bosom friend, one who literally lay in his bosom at supper,¹ and of whose intimacy with Him, confidence in Him, reciprocity of thought and feeling with the thoughts and feelings of the Redeemer's human soul, that attitude of reclining on the bosom was a meet and expressive symbol. The Lord shed his blood for Peter quite as much as for John ; considered as the Redeemer of mankind, one had no more interest in Him than the other ; but in his human character, environed by certain local and natural surroundings, and having affinities with the social system in which He found Himself, He had and He manifested predilections,—a predilection for St. John, a predilection for Martha, Mary, and Lazarus,—thereby sanctioning and giving the stamp of his consecration to the lov

¹ See St. John xiii. 23, 25.

of preference,—whether existing between persons of the same or different sexes (the principle is the same in either case), and leading us to sanctify our friendships, and to strive to purify them from all those sinful accretions, which *in us*, as inheriting a *sinful* humanity, they must be expected to have. And it goes without saying that predilection for some involves postponement of others. If I love A more than B, this implies (or rather it is only another form of saying) that I love B less than A. There is then no incompatibility or inconsistency between my loving B as myself, which both the Law and the Gospel require, and my being less attracted by B's natural character than I am by that of A.

Postponement, however, of one person to another is not positive dislike of, or aversion to, the person postponed. Are we ever justified in that dislike of, and aversion to, other people, to which it is to be feared we are none of us strangers, though in strong characters such dislike is more pronounced and decided than in weak ones? In answering this question I must draw a distinction, which may on the surface appear fine-drawn, hair-splitting, and evasive, but which I am persuaded that further reflexion will fully justify, and which illustrates the nature of God's love to us, as well as that which He requires us to extend to our brethren. Persons and characters are different things, as is clearly seen by the fact that one and the same person may undergo a great and fundamental change of character—does undergo such a change of character, when he passes through the process which is called repentance or conversion; and while we are always required to

love our neighbour's *person*, we are by no means required to love his faults or weaknesses of character, still less his sins. If he is vain, or insincere, or meddlesome, or speaks with that assumption of authority which seldom fails to irritate, it is not these foibles which I am required to love in him, but the man himself. For what says "the royal law according to the Scriptures?" These are its precise terms; "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."¹ "As thyself"—well, am I required to love *my own* faults of character, my vanity, my selfishness, my ill-temper, my undue loquacity; or is it not rather the case that I am required to hate these faults, to watch against them, to pray against them, to strive against them, to do my best endeavours to extirpate them? Every earnest Christian (in proportion as he is an earnest Christian) is striving daily against his faults and failings, and using for their correction the weapons of self-examination and prayer; and it cannot be pretended, surely, that what he seeks to chastise and correct in himself he is bound to esteem and to love in his neighbour.

But the most obvious instance of the distinction between persons and characters, as objects of regard, is to be found in the love entertained for each one of us by God and Christ. I need not surely point out that God's love for our persons is compatible and consistent with—nay is only another side of—his intense hatred of the sin which is in us, and his ardent desire to separate us from that sin. The cross of Jesus is the measure at once of God's love for the sinner's person and of his hatred of the

¹ See James ii. 8.

sinner's sin. The cross declares the hatred, no less than the love, to be infinite ; and thus the foundation of the distinction, for which we are pleading, is laid deep in the Atonement, which is itself the fundamental doctrine of our religion.

By way of clearing the great precept of the Gospel from all such confusions of thought, as might seem to place it beyond our reach in practice (what men feel to be beyond their reach is never attempted), I have spoken of the faults of our neighbours, faults which we cannot help *seeing*, if much mixed up with them, but which we can help, and are strictly warned against, judging. Judgment presupposes a controversy, the hearing and weighing of evidence on both sides, and a final decision upon it ; and as the whole of the evidence respecting our neighbour's character is never accessible to us, since we cannot read his heart, and are not cognizant of his secret moral history, anything in the way of a general decision upon his character, on the very fragmentary evidence submitted to us, must be presumptuous in a high degree, an arrogant usurpation of the Lord's own office, and a miserable violation of the law of love. But to *see* another's faults, especially when they are patent and obvious, is not to judge him ; and that these faults, when they force themselves upon us, should somewhat chill us towards him, or alienate us from him, is not necessarily incompatible with Christian love. It needs, however, to be said that, by reason of the sin which is in us, and which distorts and depraves all our perception of moral subjects, we are naturally apt greatly to exaggerate our neighbour's faults, while at the same time we greatly extenuate our

own ; while we have the eyes of a lynx for what is amiss in him, we have the eyes of a mole even for very serious defects of character and conduct in ourselves ; beholding with quick glance "the mote that is in our brother's eye," we consider not "the beam," that is in our own.¹ And in proportion as this spirit preponderates in the repulsion which we feel to his faults,—in proportion as we are unready to make allowance and excuses for him, and to condone what we see to be amiss in him (as we do so largely and liberally in our own case),—in that degree, no doubt, we violate the law of love, even when we say truly that it is not he, but his faults, that we entertain a repugnance to.

Let me now, therefore, in concluding this Chapter, give two or three plain rules as to the method of treating, and bringing into conformity with the law of love, what I will call, for want of a better word, our dislikes.

1. First ; do not allow yourself to talk of people whom you dislike ; avoid making them the subject of conversation. Patients who have a sore and tender spot in some part of their bodies are apt to be always applying their hands to the spot ; and thus they inflame and aggravate the mischief. And the talking over a person who has annoyed or thwarted us, or even who is generally unpleasing and repulsive to us, is a species of moral friction, sure to aggravate the soreness. With the roots of bitterness so quick in our hearts, we cannot trust ourselves to talk of a person we dislike ; unless indeed his character and conduct be censured by others, and we should know of extenuating circumstances, which we may

¹ See St. Matt. vii. 3, 4, 5.

allege in exculpation. Even so, however, it will be found a wholesome rule to avoid the subject as much as possible, and to turn to some other on which we are less sensitive.

2. When in company with a person you dislike, or when something brings him back to your mind, make an effort secretly to think of the esteem which God has for him, and the account which He makes of him ; how He has endowed this soul with capacities for knowing and loving Him, and has created it for no lower an end than a blissful communion with Himself ; how the Lord Jesus shed his blood as entirely for this soul, as if there had been no other soul but this alone interested in his great redemption. If we allow this thought to sink into our hearts, and ponder and pray over it until we in some measure realise it, it will be an effectual antidote to what the Christian Doctors tell us is the deadliest sin a man can commit against his neighbour,—deadlier even than hatred,—contempt. “Honour all *men*. Love the brotherhood,”¹ says St. Peter, as if the form which the love of mankind in general should take were rather that of esteem than that of affection,—an esteem founded on the relation of the individual soul to God, and Christ, and the Comforter, and which can only be built up in us by realising that relation. If we would cultivate the spirit of Christian love, we must learn to look at others, and ourselves also, as cared for, thought of, sympathized with, dealt with, by God individually, and not in mere masses.

3. “Consider the beam that is thine own eye.”

¹ 1 Pet. ii. 17.

Our Lord, in that verse of the Sermon on the Mount, does not without a deep meaning vary the word by which He expresses our discernment respectively of our neighbour's faults of character and of our own. "Why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is thine own eye?"¹ As for the mote, we merely *behold* or *see* it, we have nothing to do but open our eyes, and there it is right before us, staring us in the face; such is our readiness of discernment for our neighbour's faults. Our own, on the other hand, though grave and serious ones, require consideration and some amount of study to bring them to light. "Thou *considerest* not" (the same word as He uses respecting the lilies, which He exhorts us to study, that we may draw moral and spiritual lessons from them—"Consider the lilies"²) "the beam that is in thine own eye." The more we study our own faults and failings in the nightly self-examination, and set ourselves earnestly to correct them in the resolutions which form part of our morning prayer, the more disposed shall we be to condone, rather than condemn, the faults and failings of our neighbours.

4. Lastly; intercede at the throne of grace for the objects of your dislike, and unite them with yourself in offering the petitions of the Lord's Prayer; in your secret intention, when you recite that prayer, let the "our" and the "us" comprehend them with yourself. And to make sure of the sincerity of the prayer, be prompt and cordial in rendering them any

¹ St. Matt. vii. 3.

² St. Luke xii. 27.—Κατανοήσατε τὰ κλίνα, πῶς αὐξάνει. In the parallel passage of St. Matthew, however, the word is καταμάθετε="learn a lesson from."

little service, or doing them any act of kindness, which may suggest itself to you. If I mistake not, prayer for any one is a sovereign specific for the dislike of him, and will remove all that needs to be removed in such dislike. In a sermon on "Lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting,"¹ one of our most eloquent divines has compared the frustration of prayer by anger to the fruitless efforts of a lark to soar into the sky during the high and blustering winds of a tempest.² When, then, the lark does soar and sing, the sky must be serene and the wind must have lulled. When prayer is sincerely offered for any one, we must of necessity be in charity with him for the time being ; we shall find that whatever may have been wrong in our feeling towards him will thaw away under the soothing and hallowing influences of prayer. For prayer cannot live except in an atmosphere suited to it, and that atmosphere must be one of faith, hope, and love. Take prayer out of the atmosphere of faith, and it at once expires ; for, as being the approach of the heart to the unseen God, prayer is the body whose animating soul is faith. Take it out of the atmosphere of hope, and it expires ; for who would pray, unless he hoped for some blessing which prayer might win ? And the same may be said of love. Take prayer out of the

¹ 1 Tim. ii. 8.

² "Anger is a perfect alienation of the mind from prayer, and therefore is contrary to that attention which presents our prayers in a right line to God. For so have I seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, in hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds ; but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and unconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings ; till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the

atmosphere of love, and it cannot survive. Prayer being an approach to God, and God being love, he who is out of charity with his neighbour has a mind not attuned to prayer.

Finally ; let me say that, as the passage at the head of this Chapter teaches, those who would serve God faithfully must covet, pray for, strive after, cultivate, the grace of love above all other graces. Why ? because both our Lord and his Apostles teach that love to our neighbour sums up our entire duty ; "Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them ; for this is the law and the prophets ;"¹ "He that loveth another hath fulfilled the law. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet ; and if *there be* any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself ;"² "All the law is fulfilled in one word, *even* in this ; Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."³ What ! *All* the law ? Even that which prescribes our duty to God ? yes, even this is implicitly prescribed in the duty of love to our neighbours, for this simple reason,—that what we are required to love in our neighbour is indeed not so much himself as God's image and superscription, which he bears and reflects ; and thus the genuine love of our neighbour involves the love of God also ; and thus "love is the fulfilling of the entire law,"—

storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing as if it had learned musick and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through the air about his ministries here below.—JEREMY TAYLOR.

¹ St. Matt. vii. 12.

² Rom. xiii. 8, 9.

³ Gal. v. 14.

the brief compendium of all the virtues, wrapping up and summarizing all, just as the sunlight comprises in itself, and may be resolved into, the seven primary colours. Let, then, our labours be bestowed in this quarter of the field, and we shall not fail to make progress, and to grow in other graces as well as in this. Let us ask for it ; seek for it with honest endeavour ; knock at heaven's gate for it in expectation of an answer. Let us say ; " O LORD, who hast taught us that all our doings without love are nothing worth ; Send thy Holy Ghost, and pour into our hearts that most excellent gift of love, the very bond of peace and of all virtues, without which whosoever liveth is counted dead before thee : Grant this for thine only Son Jesus Christ's sake. Amen." ¹

¹ Collect for Quinquagesima Sunday.

CHAPTER IV

GOD'S CLAIM UPON OUR SUBSTANCE

Will a man not rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation.—MALACHI iii. 8, 9.

I SUPPOSE that every religiously-minded person has been at times crossed,—it is well for him if he have not been disturbed,—by this question, Am I doing all that I ought to satisfy God's claim upon what I possess? Am I devoting a due proportion of my income to works of piety and charity? or am I spending a larger proportion than I ought, either upon my own present comfort or, if not in a directly selfish way, yet on a provision for those who are to come after me? Undoubtedly we touch a very crucial point in our spiritual condition, as well as a very sensitive point in our consciences, when we interrogate ourselves closely and candidly as to what hold the good things of this world,—the thousand little nameless luxuries and comforts of life, all of them represented by money,—have upon our hearts and affections,—how much of them we should be ready to sacrifice and part with, if God were expressly to call for them for the relief of his poor, or

the maintenance of his Church. The story of the rich young man in the Gospels, who came running to our Saviour with a question betokening spiritual anxiety, "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life"?¹ so clearly shows that a character may give the fairest moral promise, may be earnest, upright in the discharge of acknowledged duties, worthy of all esteem,—nay, amiable and worthy of love (it is said that "Jesus beholding him loved him"²),—and yet may be at its very core worldly-minded, that is, so supremely attached to worldly good, and with such faint and powerless convictions of the existence of good of a higher order, that it cannot bring itself to part with the one in order to secure the other. The circumstance that God does not require any of *us*, as He required that young man, to sell all that we have and distribute unto the poor,—that, in the ordinary course of his providence, He allows us all to keep our property, only administering it as we think to be most for his glory and for the welfare of our fellow-creatures,—this circumstance only makes it the more necessary for us to ask ourselves whether, if such a test were proposed to us as was proposed to the rich young man, we should be able to meet it. And the first step, in order to ascertain this, must obviously be to ascertain whether we do meet such claims upon our property as God indisputably makes upon it,—whether we spend upon works of piety and charity all that, in the estimate of reason and religion, we are bound to spend. This indeed will not conclusively prove that we esteem heavenly above earthly

¹ See St. Mark x. 17.

² *Ibid.*, verse 21.

treasure, or have no undue attachment to the latter (that cannot be otherwise ascertained than by a searching and sifting self-examination); still, it is obviously the preliminary question, upon the answer to which we must advance to the solution of that deeper and more crucial one.

But possibly some of my readers may not yet have got so far as to acknowledge a distinct claim made by God upon part of their property, as being rightfully his own, and therefore to be yielded up to Him for his service or for works of mercy. They give, and not illiberally, when appealed to for help in a good cause; but perhaps hitherto more out of natural generosity, kindliness, and sympathy than as meeting an obligation, or satisfying a demand, which they could not leave unsatisfied without positive wrong and sin. Suffer me to ask them, then, whether they have ever looked at the matter in the light in which the passage of Malachi prefixed to this Chapter places it before us. In this passage of his holy Word God distinctly charges his people with robbing Him, and, in doing so, intimates that such robbery is something outrageous and monstrous. "Will a man rob God? yet ye have robbed me." When the people remonstrate, and ask an explanation of so grave a charge, the explanation given is that God had been robbed by their withholding from Him tithes and offerings; "But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings." The tithes were given for the support of the priests and Levites who ministered in the temple, and who, having no inheritance in the holy land, like the people of other tribes, must needs be supported by their

brethren. Offerings which were not tithes were mostly for similar objects. One of them would be the annual half-shekel "appointed for the service of the tabernacle" or temple, the tribute-money, which our Lord was once asked to pay, and for which payment on behalf of Himself and St. Peter, He provided by means of the piece of money found in the fish's mouth.¹ Now we have the word of God for it that the withholding these tithes and offerings from his ministers and from his house of prayer was robbery,—it was breaking the eighth commandment, only in a very aggravated form, inasmuch as the person whose property was taken away was God Himself, whose house of prayer was the temple, and his ministers the Levites. And this grievous sin had already been followed by condign punishment,—a punishment appropriate, as God's punishments commonly are, to the offence which had called it down. They had withholden from God that portion of the corn and the wine and the oil, which belonged to Him and was his due. Therefore He had shut the windows of heaven, and cut off the yield of the earth in corn and wine and oil. "Ye *are* cursed with the curse,"²—so the words ought to be rendered, and so the Revised Version does render them,—not a curse in general, but some particular curse already denounced in the Book of God, and referred back to by the definite article,—doubtless that which is threatened in the 26th Chapter of Leviticus (verses 15, 16, 19, 20), "If ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments . . . I also will do this unto you . . . I will make your heaven as iron, and your

¹ See St. Matt. xvii. 24 to the end.

² Malachi iii. 9.

earth as brass : and your strength shall be spent in vain : for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits." And this barrenness of the earth re-acted morally upon the people, furnishing them with an excuse for continuance in their robbery of God, which had in the first instance caused the barrenness. "Times are bad," they said, exactly as people say now, when they want an excuse for dropping their charities, "we really cannot afford a tenth part of the corn and the wine and the oil, when the depression in agriculture is so great." So, in what immediately follows, God persuades them to render to Him his dues by the promise that, if they no longer withhold them, He will no longer withhold "rain from heaven and fruitful seasons" ;¹ "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse" ("the whole tithe," it is in the Revised Version ; they were not to keep back part of the price, like Ananias and Sapphira,² under the plea that they were so impoverished by the bad seasons already) ; "bring ye the whole tithe into the storehouse, that there may be meat in mine house, and prove me now herewith, saith the LORD of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that *there shall not be room enough to receive it.*"³

If anything beyond what has been said is necessary to show that Almighty God lays claim to a certain proportion of men's means for uses of piety and charity, as his right and due, it may be found in the fact that under the Old Dispensation there was a whole class of offerings called free-will offerings, in

¹ See Acts xiv. 17.

² See Acts v. 1, 2.

³ Mal. iii. 10.

which the same perfectness was not required as in offerings which were regarded as dues, and paid in fulfilment of religious duty (witness the following verse ; "Either a bullock or a lamb that hath any thing superfluous or lacking in his parts, that mayest thou offer *for* a freewill offering ; but for a vow it shall not be accepted." ¹) The very word "free-will offering" speaks for itself as regards the point which has to be proved. A free-will offering is one not demanded and not solicited, but which the bent and prompting of a man's own mind determines him to make. The opposite of a free-will offering, then, is one which *is* demanded and solicited, and which therefore cannot be withheld without a breach of duty, that is, without sin.

This point having been established, the question which now arises, and to which this Chapter is designed to give an answer is, "What proportion of our worldly goods does God claim from us as his due?" It is, I think, hardly conceivable that on a subject, not only so apt to trouble the individual conscience of well-disposed people, but which has such a bearing upon important public interests,—the temporal well-being of the poor, and the maintenance of the Church and its services,—He should have left us for guidance to the action of our own minds, should have given us no indication in the Holy Scriptures as to what may be his will in the matter. And the only indication of this kind, so far as I am aware, which the Scriptures anywhere offer, is that all are bound to give a tithe or tenth part of what they possess,—a tithe of income, if we will be guided

¹ Lev. xxii. 23.

literally by the Scripture ; for the Levitical tithes were the tenth part of the annual yield of cultivated land, and also of the annual increase of the cattle grazing in the pasture-land. In the case of those earning their livelihood by professions, trades, service, or labour, their work is the capital which yields the income, and the tenth part of their earnings is God's due for works of piety and charity, which they may not withhold from Him without violating an obligation under which He has laid them.

It will be seen from what has been said that I give to the *principle* of tithe an application reaching far beyond the produce of land. Tithe, in the technical and limited sense, is, as we all know, a first charge upon all landed property, recognised and made obligatory upon every holder of such property by the law of England. Whether, as far as landed property is concerned, the moral and religious obligation is satisfied by a payment which a man has not the option of withholding, and which the law *compels* him to make, is a question on which the writer desires to express no opinion, and which every landholder must settle for himself, as before God. Our present point is that, if we are to be guided by our Bibles, the income derivable, in this artificial and complicated state of society, from any and every source ought to be made to pay tithe.

Various and some very plausible objections may be made to this doctrine, all of which, however, are capable, I believe, of a satisfactory answer. Thus it may be objected that tithe is an arrangement prescribed exclusively by the Levitical Law, and that this law is no longer binding upon Christians, our

Lord having abrogated it, and put his people under a new evangelical law, in which is nowhere found the prescription of tithe.

(1.) But, first, is it true that the entire Levitical Law is abolished? The Ten Commandments are the most material and fundamental part of the Levitical Law. Are they abrogated? We will look for an answer in the Seventh Article of Religion; “Although the Law given from God by Moses, *as touching Ceremonies and Rites*, do not bind Christian men, nor the Civil precepts thereof ought of necessity to be received in any commonwealth; yet notwithstanding, no Christian man whatever is free from the obedience of the Commandments which are called Moral.” Is the law which prescribes tithe a law “touching Ceremonies and Rites?” Clearly not. Is it a “Civil precept,” that is, a law which regulates the commonwealth, provides for the administration of justice, and generally controls the dealings of man with man? It hardly seems so. The prescription that a tenth part of revenue shall be yielded to God as his due rises above the political and social tie altogether, enters into a man’s relations and obligations to God. It very nearly resembles the Fourth Commandment, of which none of us, it is presumed, will say that it is not moral. The Fourth Commandment, understood according to its spirit and principle, defines exactly God’s claim upon our time. He claims a seventh part of it, to be kept free from secular business and devoted to worship, and moral and spiritual improvement of our characters,—in short, to edification. Those of us who live by our work could of course earn much more, if God’s Law

allowed us to labour on Sundays as well as on week days. But to do so would be to ignore a religious obligation,—God's claim upon our time. And, similarly, to withhold the tenth part of our earnings from works of piety and charity,—from the support of churches, missions, schools, hospitals, and generally the relief of the poor,—is to ignore a religious obligation,—God's claim upon our purse. The Heavenly King is pleased to lay a tax both upon our time and our substance, as an acknowledgment that we hold of Him both our life and the means of supporting it. Good subjects must pay the tax, "not grudgingly or of necessity,"¹ but cheerfully.

(2.) But, secondly, though the law of tithe was engrafted into the Levitical code, it is abundantly clear that the practice of setting apart a tenth of all earnings as a consecrated fund existed long before the giving of the Law. Thus we find Abraham giving the tenth of the spoils accruing from his victory over the four kings to Melchizedek, as being the priest of the most high God.² And we find Jacob vowing, at the beginning of his expedition to Padan Aram, that, if God brought him back to his father's house in peace, he would, in addition to other acts of devotion, give to God the tenth of all that God should give him; "Of all that thou shalt give me I will surely give the tenth unto thee"³ (what a magnificent example, by the way, that Chapter is of the combination in God's book of the sublimest revelations with the humblest practical duties—the vision of the great bright ladder immediately followed by

¹ See 2 Cor. ix. 7.

² See Gen. xiv. 20; Heb. vii. 2.

³ Gen. xxviii. 22.

Jacob's consecration of the spot, and by his resolve to be faithful in future in rendering to God the tithe of his substance!) How the practice of setting apart the tenth as a consecrated portion of a man's substance first established itself we are not informed, but probably there must have been some Divine sanction for it originally, as there doubtless was for the nearly allied practice of sacrifice. But this much is certain, that it is a practice which dates back to the most remote antiquity, and stands altogether clear of the Mosaic Law, having rooted itself in the habits of religious men centuries before the giving of the Law. Like the promise made to Abraham, the Law "was four hundred and thirty years after"¹ it. It is not Levitical, but Patriarchal in its origin.

(3.) But the great objection to the obligation of giving the tenth part of what we have as a tribute to God, is to be found in the fact that the requirement bears so much harder upon some persons than others. And as the writer himself once thought this objection a valid one, and may possibly have said something to that effect in the course of his ministry, he is all the more bound, if it were only by way of setting right those who may have been misled by him, to acknowledge that maturer reflection has led him to an opposite conclusion. He now sees, or thinks he sees very clearly, that, whatever may be said for or against the practice he is now contending for on other grounds, this objection to it cannot be for a moment maintained. Of course it is an exceedingly plausible objection, and one which can be made to look very striking by exemplifying

¹ See Gal. iii. 17.

it in an extreme case. Every one can see that the man whose income is at the rate of ten pounds a day may well afford one pound, and not feel the sacrifice ; but that to the poor needlewoman, who earns only ten pence a day, one penny represents so much food and clothing, which it pinches her severely to go without. It by no means follows, however, that because, to a person in extreme poverty, the giving up of a tenth part is a very costly sacrifice and a great trial of faith, it therefore is not his duty to give it up. Men's circumstances, ages, temperaments, and habits are so various, that all duties are much more trying to one class of persons than another. A rich man, who is not under the necessity of working for the support of himself and his family, is very accessible to the temptation of indolence ; he is tempted to hang about upon life, and do nothing except amuse himself. But what meaning (except, indeed, on Sundays) has a temptation to indolence to a factory hand, who is compelled by his necessities to work eight or ten hours out of the twenty-four ?—Temptations to impurity may be strong in youth, when the pulse of animal life is high ; but in old age, when the passions are extinct, such temptations slacken their hold, and are hardly felt at all.—The pomps and vanities of this wicked world,—dress, show, gay society, glitter,—are attractive to a girl in her teens,—it is a real trial to her to resist such fascinations ; but for the elderly man of studious habits, whose one delight is his books, such things have few or no attractions,—he may even turn away from them in disgust at their frivolity. Yet no one will deny that it is the sacred duty of the

rich man to occupy himself in some good and useful pursuit ; of the young man to control his lusts and appetites, and make a stand against sinful pleasure ; of the girl in her teens not to allow amusements to encroach upon duties, and to keep herself unspotted from the world. In short, in the system of God's Providence men are tried, never unfairly or inequitably, but in different ways, being, if I may so say, compensated for their strong temptations by insensibility to others which their neighbours find to be very strong ; and if any one is allowed to allege that, because a particular duty happens to be in his case a very trying one, he therefore may neglect it, there is an end of duty altogether. The more trying God's demand upon us is, the stronger is the faith needed to meet it ; and if a very poor man will only exercise such faith in surrendering to God the tenth of his earnings, he shall be none the poorer for it in the end,—“look, what he layeth out, it shall be paid him again.”¹ Was the widow of Zarephath any the poorer because she supplied the prophet's necessities with her last handful of meal ? Nay, the barrel of meal did not waste, neither did the cruse of oil fail, until the day when the need for them ceased, by the Lord's sending rain upon the earth.²

The last argument that I shall allege in favour of regarding a tenth part of our income as God's due, and surrendering it to Him for works of piety and charity, is that this view of the subject gives such point and emphasis to free-will offerings, and

¹ Prov. xix. 17 (as the verse is given in the nineteenth Offertory Sentence in the Communion Service).

² See 1 Kings xvii. 11 to 16.

enables us with clearness and certainty to define what is really a free-will offering, and what is not. If the tenth is God's due, and must be rendered to Him in discharge of an obligation, whatsoever exceeds the tenth is a free-will offering ; whereas, if the proportion we are bound to give is left vague and uncertain, and supposed not to be prescribed, it becomes hard to say what a free-will offering is. And there is a zest in a free-will offering, arising from the fact of its spontaneity, and of God's having declared that He loves the willing heart and the cheerful giver. See how this feature of human nature is exhibited in the history of Israel. When the Lord condescended to ask for a free-will offering for a special and temporary purpose, that of building the tabernacle ("Speak unto the children of Israel, that they bring me an offering : of every man that giveth it willingly with his heart ye shall take mine offering),"¹ the people, stimulated by the Divine request, were so zealous in meeting it that they had to be restrained in their giving ; "And they spake unto Moses, saying, The people bring much more than enough for the service of the work, which the LORD commanded to make. . . . So the people were restrained from bringing. For the stuff they had was sufficient for all the work to make it, and too much."²

It is ever so where the mind is right. There is no such stimulant to liberality as the thought that the Lord will graciously accept from us an offering, which yet He does not claim as his due, and which without sin we might omit to render unto Him,—

¹ Exod. xxv. 2.

² Exod. xxxvi. 5, 6, 7.

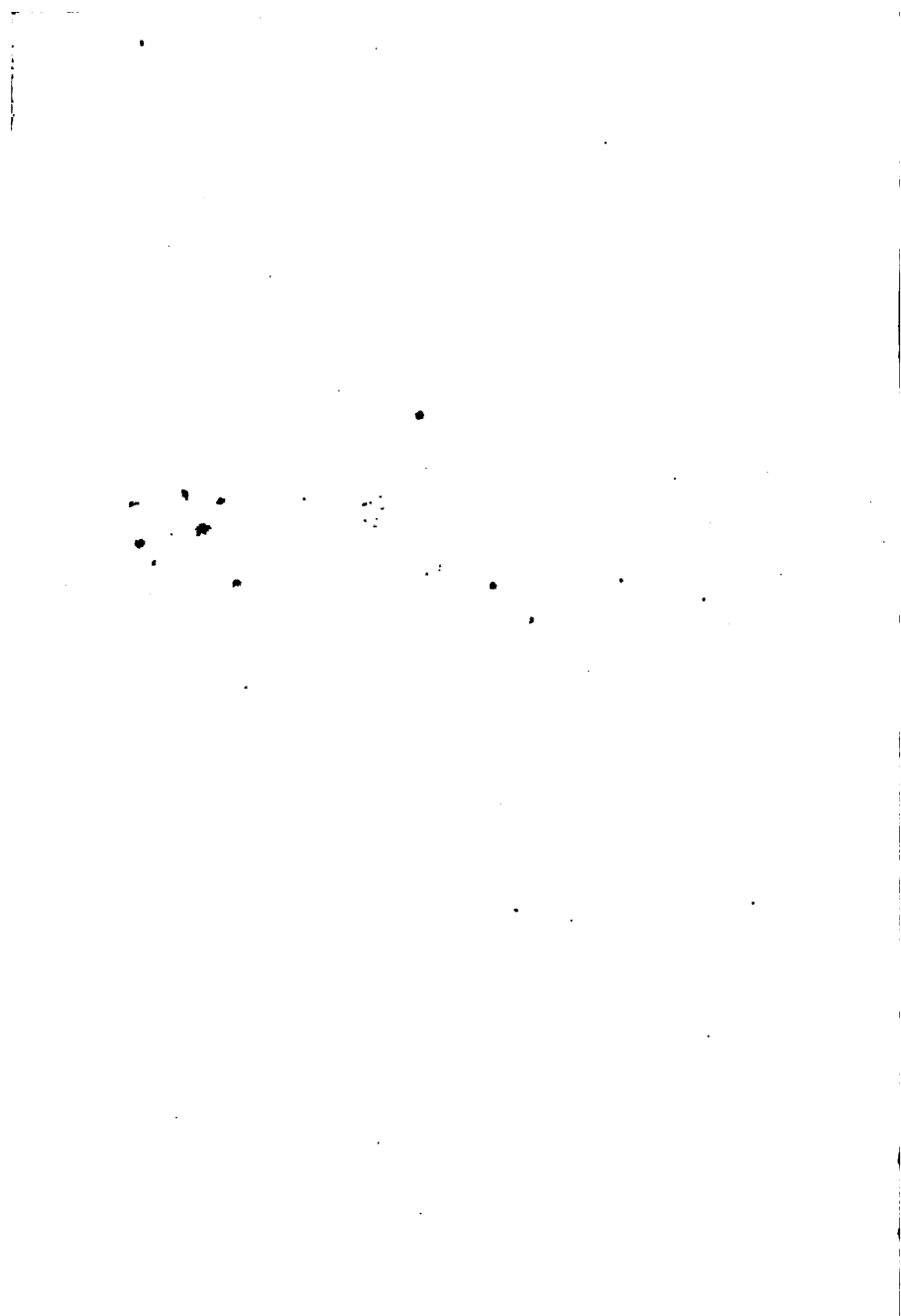
that for the priceless blessings of Christ's atoning blood, perfect and spotless righteousness, efficacious grace, not to speak of all the manifold loving-kindnesses which He shows us in the daily ordering of his Providence, He allows us to make some humble acknowledgment by providing for the natural or spiritual wants of his poor, or by erecting or beautifying his houses of prayer, or in any other of the thousand forms which works of piety or charity may take ;—that He does not pass by or slight such an acknowledgment, but graciously accepts it, blesses it, blesses us in making it, recompenses a thousand-fold the least self-denial which is dictated by a grateful love. There is no more generous motive than this, by which the will is acted upon, and none more efficacious.

Finally ; let it be considered that, if every professing Christian, high and low, were to act upon the principle of conscientiously setting apart a tenth as God's due, and also from time to time making free-will offerings to meet special emergencies, the Church would have more than enough at her command for every field of usefulness into which she is called upon to enter (the building and support of additional schools, the building and furnishing of additional churches, the support of hospitals, the employment of additional clergy, and adequate maintenance of them, home missions, foreign missions, and every other good work), and the liberality so shown would be regular, equable, and continuous in its flow, not needing (as now) to be quickened into spasmodic action by special appeals from pulpits and platforms. How greatly would

such a result redound to the furtherance of every philanthropic enterprise, while the systematic method of giving, by which it was brought about, would no less contribute to the enlargement and deepening of spiritual life in the hearts of the givers. Oh you, whose inner eye has been opened to see the great bright ladder set up on the earth, whose top reacheth to heaven, even the Divine-Human Mediator, through whom alone our prayers and praises ascend to God, and grace, mercy, and peace are conveyed downwards to us,—seal this great revelation, as Jacob sealed a similar one made to his *outward* eye, by dedication of self to God in the first instance, and of your substance, as following on yourself,—“The LORD shall be my God . . . and OF ALL THAT THOU SHALT GIVE ME I WILL SURELY GIVE THE TENTH UNTO THEE.”¹

¹ Gen. xxviii. 12, 21, 22.

THE END



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